THE GITA
IN THE LIGHT OF MODERN SCIENCE

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R. B. LAL

Foreword by
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Foreword

'One more book on the Gita,' one would say, when he comes across this new treatise on the Gita. I was once witness to an exhibition of books on the Gita. I was amazed to find that there were about five to six hundred books in several languages. This was long ago. Now the number may have gone up by hundreds.

There is a convention among the learned in India that only he who writes original commentaries on the Prasthana-Trayi, that is the triad of the Upanishads, the Brahma Sutras, and the Bhagvad Gita, and coordinates the teachings of all the three works into a philosophical system is entitled to be called an Acharya. Dr. S. Radhakrishnan and Dr. R. D. Ranade could be called modern Acharyas though they have written their learned commentaries in English.

The Gita by itself has been a rich source of inspiration, guidance, and spiritual strength to most of our modern national leaders. Many of them, such as Lajpat Rai, Tilak, Aurobindo, Annie Besant, and Gandhi have written commentaries worth studying. While Tilak's *Gita Rahasya* is the most learned and comprehensive, Sri Aurobindo's *Essays on the Gita* are very penetrating and inspiring.

The study and influence of the Gita does not seem to be restricted to Hindus or to India. Apart from its earlier translations in foreign languages, since the appearance of the English translation by Wilkins and many others following it in the latter part of the last century, Gita's popularity in English-knowing countries has been growing. Strangely enough, Warren Hastings who was instrumental in using all possible unscrupulous means to establish the British Empire in India, has written the preface to Wilkin's translation. What is stranger still is that he has predicted that long after the British Empire vanishes, the Gita would be read and reread by the British and other people! Emerson, the Pandit and Brahmin of Boston, as he and many others coming from Boston are called, hailed with great delight the Wilkin's edition of the Gita. He is said to have written from Concord to Thoreau, his friend and spiritual brother, that nothing significant had happened in the last three months in Concord except the arrival of the Gita! When I visited Los Angeles last in 1960 and met Prabhavanand at the Vedanta Society there, he told me that more than three hundred thousand copies of the Gita had been sold. He was referring to the edition which is a translation in English by Prabhavanand and Isherwood, with a meaningful preface by Aldous Huxley.

It is obvious that there is something in the Gita which responds to the deep and persistent spiritual yearning in man. It is not only the religious hunger in its restricted sense that the Gita seeks to satisfy, but it caters to the far wider seeking of man for a guidance on the path of evolution towards higher reaches of consciousness. That is why Robert Oppenheimer, a nuclear scientist of such eminence, came to study the Gita deeply; and that is how he recognised the universal and all-human significance of its teaching. The day he witnessed the first nuclear blast at Nevada, for which he was mainly responsible, he quoted the Gita in his diary saying that, that blast had the brilliance of the simultaneous rising of a thousand suns (*Bhah Sadrashi Sa Syat*, etc.) and that the nuclear bomb was born for the destruction of the worlds (*Loka Kshyakrit Pravradha*)!

The Gita is an ancient text and is invested with religious significance. It is called a scripture. This is normally the

approach of the Hindu who believes in the sacredness of the Vedas, Upanishads, and so on To a believing Hindu, Sri Krishna is an incarnation—Poornavatar—of the Supreme Being But the question is, is it necessary to restrict oneself to this approach to understand the real significance of the teaching of the Gita?

The author here makes a departure and asserts that the teaching of the Gita is universal and for the whole of humanity, it is not only for the recluse but also for the man of the world, for all who have to live in the world of today, tomorrow, and forever. Shri Lal therefore makes bold and says that even when shorn of all religious, mythological, pantheonic wrappings, the essential teaching of the Gita shines forth and stands the test of modern scientific thought, rationality and common sense Gita serves man as a unique friend, philosopher and guide

I am not in a position to assert that the earlier writers on the Gita have not at all taken into account the scientific point of view Lokmanya Tilak has pointedly quoted Heckel and others Shri Aurobindo had absorbed not only scientific thought but the whole of the essence of western modern thought and culture before he wrote on the Gita But what is significant about the present approach of the author is the emphasis he gives and the strengthening and reinforcing of the spiritual, ethical, and practical teaching of the Gita by the conclusions of modern science, especially in the matter of the oneness, whole ness, and indivisibility of the reality of existence, and the interpenetration and interdependence of all seemingly separate entities The morality that follows and the ethics of conduct which evolve are but corollaries of the facts of the unitive existence of all that seems separate and diverse

I am glad that the author stresses the double but indivisible aspect of reality—matter and spirit, energy and consciousness, being and becoming They are not two separate or separable things What exists is ONE, beingbecoming not being and becoming, nor being cum becoming The coin is one only, with the obverse and the reverse, according to the observer's limitations This realisation of oneness is in fact the essence of spirituality (*Ekatwam Anupashyatah*) and the whole of human Sadhana has to consist of progress towards this realisation of identity, that is the meaning of 'Yukta Aseeta Matparah'

While I commend this approach of the author from the point of view of inviting all persons, irrespective of their religion and beliefs, to study the Gita as a practical guide from the scientific and rational point of view, much perhaps remains yet to be done. The Bhagawad Gita awaits a treatment of the type which Dr. R. D. Ranade has managed to give to the Upanishads in his *Constructive Survey of Upanishadic Philosophy*. With the latest theories and findings of science on cosmology, metaphysics, philosophy, psychology, physics and so on in the background, Dr. Ranade has tried to examine the teachings of the Upanishads. A similar treatment, subject-wise in separate chapters, would be helpful to every student of the Gita. Such a study may incidentally prove that the mystic realisation of spiritual identity by the ancient Rishis are capable of being proved by modern findings of science. Thus those realisations would be open to all those who seek them even through reason and intellect. The result would well be a common ethos and ethic for the whole of humanity and the ultimate evolution of the Religion of Man comprehending all the levels and dimensions of life and living.

I am sure non-Hindus, and Hindus who do not want to believe blindly, and Hindus, who in addition to the satisfaction of their orthodox selves want to satisfy their intellect and common sense also, cannot but appreciate this approach of the learned author. They all stand to be benefitted by this commentary which has been offered by him with enough scholarship.

R. R. DIWAKAR

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20-11-1970

Preface

My acquaintance with the Gita dates back to my school days and extends over nearly half a century. But it was only during recent years that I got an opportunity to give it serious attention. My plan was twofold: to study as much as possible of the modern scientific thought and its bearing on the basic ideas of the Gita and to read as many of the recent commentaries on the Gita as I could lay my hands on.

There are whole libraries of books on the Gita—including some by famous sages, philosophers and thinkers. The appearance of a new book on the subject, therefore, calls for an explanation. So I may briefly state the considerations that led to this undertaking.

A comparative study of various commentaries shows that while their general thinking is more or less similar, some valuable ideas occurring in one do not appear in the others. It is necessary to collect these precious thoughts and to make them available to the lay reader in a handy form.

It is customary to explain the Gita in terms of ancient Hindu scriptures. But educated people also want to know how far the fundamental doctrines of the Gita are consistent with logic, common sense and the findings of science. This modern

or scientific approach has proved very rewarding. Combined with the old or philosophic approach, it provides a stereoscopic view and discloses many beauties of the Gita hitherto unsuspected. It also underlines, in its own impressive way, the greatness of the Gita and its importance for humanity.

There is no reason to believe that research has already exhausted the Gita's fund of life-giving ideas. As a matter of fact, I have been thrilled to find much scope for new and fruitful applications of some of the well known concepts of the Gita, such as Vishada Yoga, Buddhi Yoga, Yajna, Karma Phala Tyaga, Nitya Yoga and Vibhuti Yoga.

The common man's interest in the Gita is purely pragmatic. He does not bother whether Krishna was a historical person, when and where he lived, and whether such profound discussions could have taken place on a field of battle. Nor is he concerned with controversies about the meanings of subtle phrases or the relative superiority of various disciplines. What he wants is to learn as quickly as possible the principal teachings of the Gita in order to live by them. He would have them high-lighted and explained to him in simple, clear and convincing words so as to facilitate their assimilation for practical use.

Though conscious of the greatness of many existing commentaries and my own limitations, I have felt braved by the thought that my disadvantages might be somewhat offset by such advantages as my resources of time, scientific studies and explorations in the treasure house of Gita literature. I will offer no further apology for presuming to undertake such a difficult task. My reason for embarking on it is not any idea that I can do it better or even as well as others, but the feeling that the task is an essential one.

The Gita is not addressed to a faqir or to the rare soul who has made religious pursuits his sole occupation in life. Rather its message is meant for the world's teeming millions, whose energies are largely absorbed by the quest for bread. The objects worth seeking, according to Sri Krishna, include not mere liberation (Moksha) but also Dharma, Artha (wealth) and Kama (legitimate desires). He has stressed all these aspects of life in his discourses. The Gita does not set out to teach a new religion or even a new religious exercise or prayer of

its own Rather it shows a way of life by which the common man shouldering many responsibilities may achieve all round success and happiness It explains simple techniques by which one can consecrate all one's works and even make oneself divine Gita's interest is to produce not only lovers of God but also lovers of man and nature—not only great seers and sages but also great statesmen, great scientists, litterateurs historians, artists, industrialists, administrators and warriors

The reader will find here some repetitions of important verses and lessons In studying a great scripture like the Gita repetition is inescapable Indeed there are many who have got the Gita by heart or make a habit of reading it every day I must confess that I have used both repetitions and quotations as means of driving the lessons home

In writing this book I received constant encouragement from Swami Amitananda and my uncle Sri Binode Behari Lal Both of them as well as Sri Harish Chandra scrutinised the entire typescript and offered many valuable criticisms and suggestions Dr B L Atreya was also good enough to look through the typescript and gave much encouragement My best thanks are due to them all for their generous help I also owe a debt of gratitude to Sri Yogeshwarji to whose illuminating discourses in Mussooree I have been listening for several years and who also very kindly read through the manuscript Finally, I acknowledge my indebtedness to the writers and publishers of the many books which I have consulted or quoted

The scientific cosmopolitan and humanitarian religion of the Gita is the world s greatest need today The Gita I feel still holds many priceless treasures for its patient and devoted student It is my earnest hope that this little book while serving as a practical guide to the study of the Gita will also pave the way for some eminent scientists to take up the work which I have so humbly begun

R B LAL

Homage to the Gita

The Gita answers all my difficulties and has been my Kamadhenu, my guide, my Open Sesame, in hundreds of moments of doubt and difficulty. I cannot recall a single instance when it has failed. It has become my dictionary of daily reference.... I turn to this dictionary of conduct for a ready solution of all my troubles and trials. To-day the Gita is not only my Bible or my Koran. It is more than that. It is my Mother.

—MAHATMA GANDHI

The Gita is the blood of India's blood, and bone of her bone.... The book is really a battle cry. Spirituality is with it no retreat from men and things, but a burning fire of knowledge that destroys bondage, consumes sluggishness and egoism and penetrates everywhere. Not the withdrawn but the transfigured life, radiant with power and energy, triumphant in its selflessness, is religion.

—SISTER NIVEDITA

Gita is the fountain-head of joy eternal. It is the safest guide to the highest Truth. Gita reveals to us the Supreme Reality, embodying as it does the knowledge of Brahma. It lays open

the deepest and sublimest mysteries about here and hereafter; it has for its author no less a celebrated sage than Maharshi Vedavyasa.

—PRINCE DARA SHIKOH

The Bhagawad Gita is the deepest and sublimest production that the world possesses. I read it with a permanent feeling of gratitude towards fate that has kept me alive in order to study this work.

— WILHELM VON HUMBOLDT

The Gita is a work of imperishable significance, It gives profound insights which are valid for all times and for all religious life. We are here told that we are not to waste our time to find out the meaning of life but to give life a meaning by doing the Deed demanded of us and by such action to solve the riddle of life.

— HAUER

Millions have heard it (the Gita) read it, taught it and found in it largest hope for the soul's Godward striving. And their belief has not been utterly vain; for the Gita has a gospel to deliver, telling of a consecration of life's every work to the selfless service of God and an infinite Love that at every place and every time pours forth its illimitable grace to all that seek after it.

— DR. L. D. BARNETT

Many seriously inclined westerners, appalled at the materialism of the day, are turning to the East for enlightenment, many of whom have found light and repose in the Gita. My own pocket edition of this wonderful Hindu poem (W. Q. Judge's rendering) is dated in my own handwriting 1896, and has ever since been my constant "Guide, philosopher and friend".

— REV. A. E. MASSEY

The Gita is one of the clearest and most comprehensive summaries of the Perennial Philosophy ever to have been made. Hence its enduring value not only for Indians but for all mankind.

— ALDOUS HUXLEY

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General Introduction

1. The Gita and Modern Science

Introductory

The Gita or the Lord's song, is an inspiring call for a dedicated life. It teaches an art of living by which even the humblest of daily tasks are ennobled and spiritualised. Not religious exercises, prayer or worship alone but even the ordinary duties of life have in them the power to make a common man a man of God and this is accomplished, says the Gita, by regarding *oneself as an employee or instrument of the Lord and by* performing all actions as an offering to Him, for His sake and pleasure and for the benefit of His creatures.

The Gita is all-embracing in its catholicity and universal in its outlook and scope. Thus it boldly declares that the various religions are all acceptable to God as so many different paths leading to the same Reality. It takes as its basic raw material the common man and the things that keep him busy and shows how both can be consecrated. It unifies many ideals popularly regarded as incompatible. Thus it requires man to strive not

only for his own good but also for the good of the society in which he lives, to cultivate not only piety and virtue but also superexcellence in his profession, to seek not only divine bliss but also worldly success and happiness.

The God of the Gita does not reside in some lofty and distant heaven, but is present everywhere, is all and in all. He is living and acting in every atom and electron, in every object and creature. The entire universe is, in short, a concretisation, manifestation or embodiment of His Spirit and all the forms known to us are His forms. As the world is filled with God, it is a great privilege for man to live and labour here. The world is God's handiwork, His home and empire, His love and delight. It follows that God is greatly interested in all the work necessary for the maintenance or advancement of the world. Therefore, every thought, word or deed that directly or indirectly benefits the world or even a single living being, is a sacrifice or service to the Lord Himself. So the Gita declares that any one by performing his duty to the best of his ability, by serving his fellow men, by extending the frontiers of human knowledge or power, worships the Lord and attains the highest perfection. In fact, the Gita's command is to see and worship the Lord abiding in all creatures and to make the whole of life an unbroken adoration of God. In this way the seeming antagonism between God and the world is completely resolved.

The Gita presents a grand synthesis of science and religion, reason and faith, philosophy and ethics, the ideal and the practical, the sacred and the secular, the natural and the supernatural. Among the scriptures of the world the Gita is one which is in full accord with science. Science is concerned with the material universe, the Gita with the world of matter as well as spirit. The outlook and methods of the Gita are similar to those of science. Thus like science it gives the pride of place to reason in the conduct of life, encourages an enquiring and questioning mind, submits all theories to objective verification and directs the aspirant to do good to all and not merely to those who profess faith in the Gita or in its Divine Teacher. The epoch-making discoveries of modern science have been adding new lustre to its teachings. The message of the Gita may, therefore, aptly be called the Religion of Science.

The Gita's Scientific Outlook

Science has made life longer, easier and happier for millions. Its material benefits are household words. But not so well known is the revolution it has been effecting in people's habitual ways of thinking and believing. With the advance of science the age of blind faith has ended and the era of reason has begun. Science is devoted to the pursuit of truth for the sake of truth, regardless of personalities and regardless of consequences. The chief tool with which science works is the intellect, which should not only be keen and clear but also free from the shackles of magic and superstition, creed and dogma, tradition and custom, orthodoxy and conservatism. The scientist thinks for himself and does not allow his thinking to be done by others, however eminent. He tests and verifies all things and takes nothing on trust. With the intellect thus emancipated, he approaches all problems with an open mind and welcomes new truth wherever he can find it. He is progressive in his outlook and knows full well that life requires the constant assimilation of new things and the elimination of those which are old and unserviceable.

The materials with which the scientist works are facts. By distilling facts he produces knowledge (pure science), which he later converts into power (applied science or technology). His results to be of any value must be based on the solid rock of facts. He, therefore, verifies facts and sorts them out from mere opinions, conjectures and hearsay. From observed and verified facts he draws logical conclusions. He reduces a large number of facts to a simple formula or law of nature and formulates theories to explain the working of these laws. Every theory, before it is accepted, is thoroughly tested and verified by a number of scientists; and it must not only explain all existing facts but also lead to the discovery of new facts. When new facts come to light, which are inconsistent with the current theory, it is the theory which is discarded and not the facts. This leads to the formulation of a new theory which explains all the old as well as the new facts. All theories are, therefore, tentative and subject to change on the emergence of new facts. The scientist knows that no theory, however advanced, can be infalliable. Every significant advance of

science entails the demolition of old theories. The scientist, therefore, realises that even the best of his theories is a mere approximation to the truth and by no means a perfect representation of it. In fact, the scientist has begun to feel that the complete and ultimate truth may for ever elude his grasp.

When we study the Gita we are struck by the fact that in its teachings and its general approach to the problems of life, it anticipated by long the methods and thoughts of modern science.

At the very beginning of the Gita we find Sri Krishna driving Arjuna's chariot. Sri Krishna is the friend, philosopher and guide of Arjuna, senior in years and position, and yet he accepts an humble role in the joint venture, as a charioteer, when he well might have been the dictator or director. This action of Sri Krishna is alone sufficient to prove that he is not an ordinary teacher of the authoritarian type. Rather, he explains things and encourages the disciple to think for himself, to make his own decisions and shoot his own arrows. At the conclusion of the Gita he tells Arjuna:

> Thus has knowledge, most secret of secrets, been imparted to you by Me. Having reflected on it fully, do as you like.
> XVIII/63

When the discourse begins Arjuna has some views of his own but listens to Sri Krishna with rapt attention and an open mind. Encouraged by Sri Krishna, he asks questions, raises objections and expresses doubts in order to get his ideas straight. When Sri Krishna gives him a verbal description of God, he does not feel fully satisfied, but in the spirit of a true scientist, asks for a practical or ocular demonstration and Sri Krishna, instead of taking offence at this request, readily agrees to satisfy Arjuna's curiosity and enables him to have a vision of his wonderful universal form — limitless, all-pervasive and showing within his body all grades of beings, animate as well as inanimate.

The Gita teaching hardly begins when Sri Krishna calls upon Arjuna to practise Buddhi Yoga or the Yoga of the intellect (II/39) and take refuge in his own enlightened and God-oriented understanding (II/49). Among the tools available to

man the intellect is the most powerful and best. The Gita, therefore, lays the greatest emphasis on the development of the intellect and its working under divine guidance. To drive home the lesson Sri Krishna identifies himself with intelligence in living beings (VII/10, X/34). The great revolutionary that he was, he did not hesitate to declare that the Vedas, gurus and wise ones are there only to train and enlighten the intellect and not to supplant it (II/46, 52). And he did not want any special treatment for himself. So at the end of the discourse he called upon Arjuna to reflect on what he had been told and then to act as he deemed fit.

The Gita is universal in its scope and objectives. Its teachings are valid everywhere and at all times. They can be practised by all and not only by a few. Equally they aim at the welfare of all humanity—in fact of all creatures—and not merely of those who have faith in Sri Krishna and profess to follow his teachings. Again and again he has called upon man to work for the good of all (Lokasangraha III/25), in the spirit of Yajna or sacrifice (III/9), to rejoice in doing good to all creatures (V/25, XII/4), to see and worship the Lord abiding in all creatures (VI/31) and to perform all the works of life—not merely religious exercises and austerities—as an offering to the Lord (IX/27). And he who does this attains supreme perfection (III/19, IX/28, XVIII/46).

Science accepts facts as they are and does not waste its time wishing they were otherwise. It is no headache to scientists that light travels in straight lines and the oceans are filled with brine instead of milk and honey. They do not seek to change facts but to discover the laws that govern them so that by working within those laws they may make the world better and happier. The Gita's approach to the problems of life is similar. To take an example, the greatest fact of life is the fact of our own existence. The Gita accepts it and does not deny or denounce it. Far from calling the world an illusion or delusion or a prison house, Sri Krishna has boldly declared that it is filled with God, is holy and divine. Life is the greatest gift of God, an invitation to a grand feast, an opportunity to seek and find the Lord, who, though present everywhere and in all, takes delight in playing the game of hide and seek with his beloved children. Sri Krishna has enjoined fullness and

richness of life. He has given his blessings to all endeavours and noble aspirations, and not merely those popularly known as religious or spiritual. Thus he has asserted that in human beings he is desire not contrary to dharma (VII/11). He is manliness in men (VII/8). He is present in all acts of self-sacrifice seeking the good of society (IX/16). He is also the ultimate beneficiary and enjoyer of all such works (V/29, IX/24). He is present in intelligence (VII/10, X/34), in statesmanship (X/38), in prosperity, wealth and fame (X/34), in victory (X/36) as well as in glory (VII/10, X/36)— wherever they may be found. Among the divine qualities he includes not only purity, truth and non-violence, but also fearlessness, fortitude and vigour (XVI/1, 3).

Next in importance to the fact of life is the great fact of the existence of pain and misery. Not even the greatest or holiest of men is altogether exempt from it. The usual reaction of common people, when overtaken by sorrow, is one of indifference, abject surrender or constant complaining against the world as well as God. The Gita does not countenance any of these attitudes. It accepts the fact of sorrow and suffering but calls upon man to face it bravely. Significantly, the Gita begins with a narration of the grief of Arjuna and the title of the first discourse: 'Yoga of Arjuna's dejection' is highly suggestive of the Gita's attitude towards the trials and troubles of life. They are not the downhill path to the slough of despond but an impetus and a means to union with God. And this will be possible only if they spur us to make renewed attacks on our problems with fresh thinking and redoubled energy. As if to leave no room for doubt on this point, Sri Krishna, at the very start of his message, sounds a clarion call to humanity to face the challenges of life courageously:

> O Arjuna, whence comes this dejection in you in (such a) crisis, unbecoming of an Arya, heaven—impeding and disgraceful? II/2
>
> O Partha, yield not to unmanliness; it is unbecoming of you. Cast off this abject weakness of heart and stand up (for fight), O scorcher of foes. II/3

These are memorable verses which hold the key to one of the

most outstanding problems of life—that of sorrow and suffering.

Another major fact of life is toil. Many believe that this is a curse laid upon man, but according to the Gita work is one of the rights of man (II/47). It is, in fact, his greatest privilege on earth by means of which he can reach the highest peaks of worldly and spiritual attainments. True enough, this privilege is often abused and then it becomes the root of all evil and misery. But there is no reason why this should be so. Work by itself is neither good nor bad, but it is inescapable since even the maintenance of life would not be possible without it. The Gita is largely concerned with the correct ways of living and acting in the world which lead to the greatest good of all. The crux of the Gita's teaching is to work efficiently but in a selfless spirit (II/47), whole-heartedly but without attachment (III/25); to work for the good of society (III/25) and to renounce the fruit of one's labours, that is to plough back into the service of humanity what one earns by the sweat of one's brow (XII/12). This is no secret or exclusive formula but one that appeals to the reason of man, can be practised by all and would be acceptable even to the greatest and most sceptic of scientists because they can think of no better. Thus Einstein, most celebrated of modern scientists, wrote in 1931, "From the standpoint of daily life, there is one thing we know, that man is here for the sake of other men.... Without the sense of collaborating with like-minded beings in...scientific research, my life would have been empty."

Another common fact of life is the existence of evil in ourselves and in others. Howsoever we may wish that God had made us wiser and better, things do not improve by mere wishing. Evil is imperfection and if things and people could shed their imperfections they would melt into the Supreme Spirit. Moreover, if every one were perfect, we would have nothing to do and would be bored to death. So we must accept the fact of evil and face its challenge as best we can. The methods generally adopted to deal with evil include submission or persuasion, correction, reform and punishment. But on many occasions, as at the beginning of the Gita, it becomes a crucial question whether to resist evil or not. Non-violence is a very noble weapon and produces amazing results when wielded by

a Christ or a Gandhi. But in the hands of lesser people it may not be always successful. There are many situations when the policy of non-resistance may defeat its own purpose: it may save a few evil doers at the cost of the lives of many innocent people. In such circumstances, Sri Krishna's advice to the average person is: Stand up and fight! Conquer your foes! (II/37, XI/33). And Sri Krishna adds that whenever there is decay of righteousness and evil prevails, he comes down on earth as an incarnation to protect the good and destroy the evil doers (IV/7, 8). Man cannot afford to remain indifferent to the evil around him but should do his best to eradicate it.

Finally, there is in life the most unpleasant fact of death — universal, unpredictable but inescapable. Death is a corollary of life, a phenomenon of nature which keeps the world ever fresh and lively. Whatever it may be, it has to be faced bravely. Death, however, holds no terrors for a man whose life has been lived well. It is merely a change of form and not an annihilation of the personality. It provides new instruments and new people to work with, new opportunities and new avenues of advancement. Far from basing its teachings on the fear of death, the Gita has called upon man not to be afraid of death and not to grieve over it:

> The wise grieve neither for the living nor for the dead. II/11
> As the dweller in the body experiences in the body childhood, youth, old age, so he passes on to another body; the steadfast grieve not thereat. II/13
> As a man casting off worn-out garments takes on new ones, so the dweller in the body, casting off worn-out bodies, enters into others that are new. II/22
> Certain is death for the born and certain is birth for the dead. Therefore, over the inevitable you should not grieve. II/27

Scientists recognise that all sciences are necessary and useful to meet the manifold needs of humanity. They do not claim any monopoly of wisdom for their own particular branch of study nor quarrel about the superiority of one science over the others. Similarly, as people differ in their tastes and temperaments and start from different stages of development,

they cannot all follow the same path either in their worldly or in their spiritual life. Sri Krishna, while recounting appreciatively most of the special sadhanas or religious paths in vogue at the time, has made no attempt to impose any one of them on the aspirant. He has not only left the choice to the individual disciple but even declared that he favours all the paths by which men may approach him. And he applies this principle to both sacred and secular activities:

> However men approach Me even so do I welcome them, for the path men take from every side is Mine. IV/11
> Man reaches the highest perfection by each being devoted to his own duty.... He from whom is the evolution of all beings, by whom all this is pervaded, by worshipping Him with his own duty, a man wins perfection. XVIII/45, 46

Scientists also acknowledge the necessity for a variety of professions and persuasions. Thus A. N. Whitehead, mathematician and philosopher, writes in his book "Science and The Modern World': "Almost equally dangerous is the Gospel of Uniformity.... A diversification among human communities is essential for the provision of the incentive and material for the Odyssey of the human spirit. Other nations of different habits are not enemies but godsends. Men require of their neighbours something sufficiently akin to be understood; something sufficiently different to provoke attention, and something great enough to command admiration. We must not expect, however, all the virtues. We should even be satisfied if there is something odd enough to be interesting."

As the author of endless multiplicity and variety in the universe, God cannot be an apostle of the cult of Uniformity.

These few examples show that the outlook and message of the Gita are in complete harmony with the spirit of science. What is more, the discoveries of modern science are providing increasing confirmation of the teachings of the Gita, as shown hereafter.

Order in Nature

As a result of his observations in everyday life man discovered

long ago that the phenomena of nature are characterised by a certain degree of regularity, that the properties and behaviour patterns of things exhibit constancy and consistency, that, in short, order prevails in nature. So we instinctively believe that the sun will rise tomorrow morning, sugar will sweeten our tea and books and furniture will stay in the places where we leave them. Our whole management of life is based on the understanding that inanimate things and forces of nature will behave in future as they have done in the past. Relying on this, scientists have been systematically observing facts and gradually unfolding the mysteries of nature. The advancement of science presupposes this stability and predictability of nature (within wide limits) and, in turn, it confirms the postulate that the workings of nature take place according to laws which are definite and can be discovered. If nature were arbitrary or capricious, science and even life would become almost impossible.

One important corollary to this rule of order in nature is the law of causation: that every cause, every action, produces its appropriate effect, which is the same at all times and everywhere. Thus scientists have found that a ray of light bends through a certain angle when passing from one transparent medium to another and this does not depend on the personality of the observer or the place, time or season of the experiment. Similarly when hydrochloric acid is mixed with silver nitrate, silver chloride is formed, and we do not expect that on certain occasions this reaction may yield common salt or alum or sugar. Nor do we apprehend that the silver chloride formed by one experimenter will quietly find its way into the hands of another. These simple postulates have stood the test of time and are the very basis of scientific research. In his book *Gods and Men* Sir Richard Gregory, a noted scientists, says: "Though science may not be able to contribute much to the ultimate problem of spiritual beliefs, it does teach that every action carries with it a consequence — not in another world but in this — to be felt either by ourselves or in the generations to come. This is the law of the natural world and cannot be transgressed without punishment, whether by saint or sinner."

The reader will realise that this law of the natural world as stated by a scientist in his own words is nothing but the law

of Karma, which is one of the basic tenets of Hinduism and has been known to Hindu seers for thousands of years. Thus the law of Karma is just an extension to the moral and spiritual fields of the law of cause and effect universally accepted in the world of science.

According to the law of Karma man is responsible for his own acts. He can rise or fall by his own efforts. He is the architect of his own fortune and not a mere straw tossed about on the ocean of life by the winds of fate. Sri Krishna says in the Gita:

> One should lift oneself up by one's own efforts and should not degrade oneself. One's own self is one's friend and one's own self is one's enemy. VI/5
> Never does any doer of good come to woe. VI/40

These verses are a message of hope for all mankind. Our future is in our own hands and not at the mercy of a God who is as arbitrary as he is powerful. By our efforts we can attain undreamt of heights of goodness, wisdom and greatness. Good work is never lost but nothing can be gained without effort.

Scientists make their experiments with pure chemicals and pure forces in order to observe the effects of a single cause. This facilitates the correlation of cause with effect. In human life each effect is very often the combined result of an odd assortment of many preceding actions performed at different times. In such circumstances, the law of Karma seems to be ineffective or held in suspense, but this is not a fact. This law is inescapable and irrevocable, and is the very basis of all creation; but as one action may nullify, dilute or reinforce another, and as the observed effects cannot always be traced back to their causes, the law of Karma remains valid when considered over a period of time and for a number of actions. Though we are not in a position to predict the results of individual actions, we know that taken statistically all actions produce their appropriate consequences in the fullness of time. Parallels occur in the field of science. G. R. Harrison explains this in the following words in his book *What Man May Be*: "Virtue does have long term survival value even though the good appear at times to die young. Much of man's uncertainty

as to cause and effect arises from the fact that the results of nature's operations must be taken statistically rather than as individual cases. This is true even in the physical laws of the universe, where cause and effect seem to break down in specific occurrences, but do not if groups of happenings are averaged."

A logical corollary to the doctrine of Karma is the theory of reincarnation, because each soul needs a number of lives to complete its evolution and fulfil its mission. The theory of reincarnation alone provides a reasonable explanation for the inequalities found in the world in respect of the environment, condition and ability of man and man.

'I am the Source of All Creation'

"All that exists is One", says the Vedanta, "wise men only perceive it differently." This is one of the fundamental doctrines of Hinduism and one round which its whole philosophy and religion have been built. Without propounding any fanciful theory of creation, Sri Krishna goes to the root of the matter and simply says in his characteristic, forthright way: 'I am the source of all creation; all has evolved from Me' (X/8). 'I am the father, mother and grandsire of this universe, its sustainer and ruler' (IX/17). 'I am the source of the entire creation and in Me it again dissolves' (VII/6). 'There is nothing else besides Me' (VII/7). 'Vasudeva is all' (VII/19). '(The creatures) that are harmonious, active, slothful (Sattvik, rajasik, tamasik), know these as from Me' (VII/12). 'Having become the fire which dwells in the bodies of living beings and uniting with the breaths, I digest the four kinds of food' (XV/14). 'I am the self seated in the heart of all beings, I am the beginning, middle and end of all beings' (X/20). 'He who sees Me present in all beings, and sees all beings existing in Me, I am never out of sight of him, nor is he ever out of sight of Me' (VI/30). 'Verily He is the imperishable substance abiding equally in all perishable beings' (XIII/27). 'Seeing the same Lord dwelling equally in all, he does not kill his Self by the Self and thereby reaches the supreme state (XIII/28).

According to Hinduism God created the universe out of Himself, as a spider produces a web. But this is not the view of

other religions. They find it impossible to reconcile themselves with the idea that the great Lord is present in the wicked and the imperfect or in things that decay or rot or change. Little do they realise that if God does not abide in such creatures and things, then He will be left with very little room on earth to live in! Some of these religions believe that God created the universe out of nothing, contrary to the finding of science that nothing can be created out of nothing. Others teach that God created the universe as a potter makes pots out of clay, but do not say where the potter got the clay. According to these religions God rules the world from His throne in some high and remote heaven. Though His knowledge and power may be everywhere, He himself is entirely apart from his creation and far, far above it. This arrangement implies two separate and independent creators — God for the spirit, the holy and the good; and the Devil or Mammon for matter, the wicked, the imperfect and the perishable. But if Mammon is the Maker and King of the world, where does God come into the picture?

Nor is this arrangement rational. For if we believe in God we must define Him as omnipotent, omniscient and omnipresent. Therefore from the very definition of God it follows that He pervades all beings and there is no existence independent of or unrelated to Him; in other words, everything that exists has emanated from God and is a manifestation of Him, big or small. And this is precisely the teaching of the Gita. Forms are different and many, but the Reality is one and the same. The average person sees only outward forms; the wise man sees both outward forms and the inner Reality.

To take a simple example. If the same sap in a tree can transform itself into root and stem, branch and leaf, flower and fruit and gum and if each fruit can consist of several things like skin and pulp, juice and fibre and seed, is there any thing intrinsically illogical in the belief that the same God has assumed all the innumerable forms appearing in the world?

If the entire universe has evolved out of the same all-knowing, all-powerful and all pervasive Entity, it follows that gold, iron and wood, sugar and salt; heat, light and electricity; plant, bird, beast and man; life and consciousness; thought and feeling are all, in essence, one and the same thing or reducible to one and the same thing. Thus stated, the problem shifts

from the domain of philosophy to that of science. So let us see what scientists discovered or thought about the origin of things.

There are countless objects on earth. On analysis by chemists they are found to be composed of a few hundred thousand different kinds of substances, the smallest particles of which, possessing all the properties of the original substance, are known as molecules. Thus all matter is found to be composed of a few hundred thousand different kinds of molecules. On breaking up these molecules chemists have come down to about ninety odd elementary substances, which cannot be subdivided into simpler substances and whose smallest particles are known as atoms. By combining these ninety odd atoms in different kinds of groups all the matter in the world has been formed. Armed with this knowledge and making use of these atoms, chemists all over the world are preparing hundreds of new kinds of substances, first in the laboratory and subsequently on a commercial scale, for example plastics, nylons, rubber goods, drugs, dye-stuffs and insecticides. Thus by analysis as well as by synthesis it has been conclusively proved that though objects are countless they are all ultimately reducible to about ninety elementary substances.

These ninety odd elements are by no means the final stage of simplification. Using different techniques physicists have found that all the different varieties of atoms are composed of three fundamental particles — protons, neutrons and electrons. These are, so to say, the three kinds of bricks with which the entire edifice of the material universe has been built. Protons and electrons carry positive and negative electric charges respectively, while neutrons have no charge. Physicists have further discovered that though neutrons, protons and electrons are found in nature in abundance, they are not the ultimate particles. For under certain extraordinary conditions they can all be converted into one another and into radiant energy.

Different kinds of matter were thus proved to be inter-convertible, being derived from the same thing. So were the different forms of energy such as heat, light, electricity and motion. But matter and energy remained separate entities and no one could dream of converting one into the other, until Einstein put forward his now famous equation expressing the

relationship between the mass of a body and its velocity. Experimental verification of his equation came soon after, establishing a complete equivalence between matter and energy. Apart from laboratory experiments, it has been estimated that the enormous energy radiated by the sun arises from the transmutation of hydrogen into helium and entails a daily loss of 380,000,000,000 tons of matter by the sun. In the bursting of an atom bomb the conversion of matter into energy takes place in a sudden, explosive manner. In an atomic reactor the same transformation is arranged to take place in an orderly and regulated fashion generating energy for useful purposes. Making use of this knowledge of the structure of the atom, scientists have realised the alchemists' dream of the transmutation of elements in the laboratory. Thus mercury has been changed into gold and boron into carbon or beryllium. By similar techniques many atoms have been transformed into heavier atoms (called isotopes) possessing properties similar to the original substance. Many isotopes are also found to occur in nature in small quantities.

Another important discovery of modern physics is that of cosmic radiation. Its source is not the sun or other stars nor can it be released by any of the natural processes known on earth. Therefore it must come from outer space. The most penetrating radiations produced by scientists are X-rays and Gamma rays. X-rays can penetrate a few millimetres and gamma rays a few inches, of lead. But cosmic rays will pass through 16 feet of lead. Cosmic radiation, therefore, possesses in a small way several of the properties generally attributed to God: its origin is unknown, it fills all space, it is subtle and powerful and can under suitable conditions be transformed into any kind of matter or energy.

The underlying unity of matter and energy, as demonstrated by Science, has been beautifully summed up by Lincoln Barnett. In his book *The Universe and Dr. Einstein*, he says: "Through the centuries the varied currents of discovery, theory, research and reason have steadily converged, mingled and flowed onward into ever widening and deepening channels. The first long advance was the reduction of the world's multifarious substances into 92 natural elements. Then these elements were reduced to a few fundamental particles. Concurrently the

various "forces" in the world came to be recognised one by one as varying manifestations of electromagnetic force, and all the different kinds of radiation in the universe — light, heat, X-rays, radio waves, gamma rays — as nothing more than electromagnetic waves of varying wave-length and frequency. Ultimately the features of the universe distilled down to a few basic qualities — space, time, matter, energy and gravitation. But in special Relativity, Einstein demonstrated the equivalence of matter and energy, and in General Relativity he showed the indivisibility of the space — time continuum. The Unified Field Theory now culminates and climaxes this coalescing process. For from its august perspective the entire universe is revealed as one elemental field in which each star, each atom, each wandering comet and slow-wheeling galaxy and flying electron is seen to be but a ripple or tumescence in the underlying space-time unity. And so a profound simplicity supplants the surface complexity of nature. The distinctions between gravitational force and electromagnetic force, matter and energy, electric charge and field, space and time, all fade in the light of their revealed relationships and resolve into configuration of the four dimensional continuum which is the universe. Thus all man's perceptions of the world and all his abstract intuitions of reality merge finally into one, and the deep underlying unity of the universe is laid bare."

With modern science proving conclusively that all forms of matter and physical energy are identical and interchangeable, one important part of the basic concept of Vedanta, namely, that all is one, has been established beyond doubt. Scientists may call this common source of all by such names as matter or energy or space—time continuum or mind—stuff or thought or knowledge, and philosophers may call it God, but this is only a difference in name. The important thing to remember is that the essential Reality, the primordial source of all matter and energy, is one and the same.

What now remains to be shown is that life and consciousness, thought and feeling, will and intelligence are, in essence, identical with one another and also with matter and energy.

To prove the equivalence of two things it has to be demonstrated experimentally that they can be converted one into the other or both can be derived from or reduced to one and

the same thing. But before scientists succeed in getting such direct proofs, they find various kinds of similarities between the two objects concerned: for example in respect of their structures or response to or effect on certain other selected objects. Such similarities will serve as pointers to the essential unity or identity of the two objects in question.

Now it was long known that living creatures produce sound, heat and motion. Scientists have found that living creatures also generate electricity and light.

Science has discovered the amazing phenomenon of bio-electricity: the human body, for example, is seething with electrical activity and functions as a living electrical battery. If two points on the body are chosen for experiment, the flow of electricity between them can be measured by means of highly sensitive instruments. Making use of this property, scientists have devised two valuable instruments—the electrocardiograph and the electroencephalograph—which record the electrical impulses in the region of the heart and the head respectively and assist in the diagnosis of heart and brain diseases. Bio-electric potentials are usually very weak. But some fish and related animals are exceptions. Thus the electric eel found in the Amazon and Orinoco rivers develops a potential as high as 600 volts and uses its electric organ to defend itself or to stun or kill prey.

Another remarkable phenomenon is that of bioluminescence. Many living things such as fungi, glow worms, fire flies, and some kinds of fish have long been known to emit light. There are also some luminous bacteria which grow on dead animals, for example dead fish and bodies left on battle fields. By their investigations scientists have been able to find forty groups of animals that emit light.

To facilitate further examination I give a chart (page 18) which shows how food, after assimilation by living creatures, gets transformed into body matter and life force, the latter again subdividing itself into (i) physical energy, (ii) mental and (iii) emotional energy.

Thus we see that all the four principal constituents of a living creature, namely its body and its physical, emotional and mental energies, arise from the same source, namely the food it eats. The three kinds of bodily energies are, therefore, not

2

Food

Life processes

Body Matter

A. Appearing as living cells, bones, flesh, fat, blood, hair, skin, nails, etc.

Life Force

B. Physical energy appearing as Movement (heart beat, breathing circulation of blood, exercise, work) Heat, light Sound, Electricity, etc.

C. Emotional energy appearing as sensation, feeling desire, love, hatred, anger, enthusiasm, etc.

D. Mental energy appearing as Consciousness, thought, concentration, reason, memory, imagination, etc.

radically different from one another but only different manifestations of the same vital force which originates from matter (food).

We may now examine the problem from another angle, namely, the effect each group of constituents has on the other three.

Take first the effects of matter on the various kinds of energy found in a living creature. These effects have long been recognised. In health, food, drink and air are readily converted into energy. We also know that there are substances (vitamins, tonics, alcohol) that increase the generation of energy and medicines that help cure disease. Further, there are special drugs that affect the physical energy of the body, such as body temperature, muscular movements, heart beats, breathing and blood pressure; and another set of drugs that affect the mental and emotional energy, for example pain relievers, tranquillizers, soporifics and anaesthetics. Laughing gas affects both the physical and emotional energies and there are poisons that quickly destroy all kinds of energy.

Likewise various forms of physical energy also affect the body and its mental and emotional energy. The effects of some of the well known forms of physical energy—exercise and work, sunlight and music on the state of the body, the mind and the emotions are common knowledge. It is also known that applications of heat and cold relieve pain. Electric shocks have a beneficial effect in cases of brain disorder. Deep X-rays also possess curative properties.

Next we may consider how mental or emotional energy influences the body and its physical energy. Worry is known to cause high blood pressure, peptic ulcers and heart disease. Outbursts of anger raise the blood pressure and pulse rate and may also cause headache. Grief dulls the appetite. Fear or anger causes the adrenal glands to send out extra adrenalin molecules which release extra energy and prepare the body either to flee or to fight the enemy. Intense thoughts or emotions can produce tears or perspiration. Sight of food may make an animal's mouth water. Generally speaking, negative thoughts and feelings are harmful to both health and happiness. Conversely, the positive thoughts and feelings—of love, hope, courage, self-confidence, the feeling that you are liked by your fellow men—are all

conducive to both mental and physical well-being.

We may also consider the inter-relation of emotional and mental energies. It is well known that anger is the enemy of reason: worry, nervousness and even feelings of self-consciousness paralyse the working of the mind: thus fear causes temporary loss of memory. On the other hand, love in the form commonly known as interest is a powerful promoter of some of the highest functions of the brain such as concentration, memory, imagination and inventiveness.

We are more or less familiar with the effects of a man's thoughts and feelings on his own health and spirits. But no less profound, though not so well known, are the effects produced on a man by the words, thoughts and feelings of others. Thus we know of many people whose lives were transformed by association with a lofty soul or even by a word from a loved or revered one. As a result of their researches modern scientists have reached some remarkable conclusions, for example—

(1) When pupils receive love and encouragement from their teachers, their mental and physical development is quickened.

(2) By establishing an atmosphere of approval in his organisation, that is by generously giving his support, trust, encouragement and appreciation to his subordinates, an executive boosts up their morale, arouses their enthusiasm to do their best for the undertaking and also improves their health and efficiency.

(3) When infants receive love from their parents or nurses their mental and physical growth is stimulated. In his book 'The Humanisation of Man', Ashley Montagu has drawn attention to the recent discovery that thousands of babies die from lack of love. Babies who are wasting away are quickly cured when given proxy mothers who do nothing more than love and caress them. The independent observations of a number of doctors and investigators have shown that love is an essential ingredient in the nourishment of every baby and that unless he is loved he will not grow and develop as a healthy organism—psychologically, spiritually or physically. Even though he is physically well nurtured, he may waste away and die if he is starved for love.

It is thus clear that the rays of love and kindness, hope and cheer, good will and encouragement, which a living creature receives from others, produce a similar effect on his body and

life force as do the best of foods and tonics, sunlight, air and exercise.

Psychiatrists and others have collected a good deal of experimental data to show that thoughts communicated by one person to another during sleep, hypnosis or waking state can have a profound effect on the latter's health and happiness. This method is often used to cure diseases or reform the habits of a subject or patient.

One of the most commonly used mixtures of thought and feeling is prayer. What is its essential nature—matter or energy, electrons, protons or photons? In the words of Dr. Alexis Carrel, Nobel Prize winner in medicine, "Prayer is the most powerful form of energy one can generate. It is a force as real as terrestrial gravity. As a physician, I have seen men, after all therapy had failed, lifted out of disease and melancholy by the serene effort of prayer.... Prayer, like radium, is a source of luminous, self-generating energy.... In prayer human beings seek to augment their finite energy by addressing themselves to the infinite source of all energy. When we pray we link ourselves with the inexhaustible motive power that spins the universe. We pray that a part of this power be apportioned to our needs. Even in asking, our human deficiencies are filled and we arise strengthened and repaired.... Whenever we address God in fervent prayer, we change both soul and body for the better. It could not happen that any man or woman could pray for a single moment without some good result."

To sum up, the body's wonderful biochemical factory converts food into many kinds of living matter as well as various forms of physical, emotional and mental energy. Howsoever different these many end-products may appear, they originate in the same common source. Moreover, mental and physical energies can be transformed into each other as also into matter. Thus there is overwhelming evidence that matter and energy, thought and emotion, life force and mechanical force are all different manifestations of one Reality, as Hindu philosophers discovered many years ago.

There are several other well known facts of daily life which point to the same conclusion.

Water is composed of hydrogen and oxygen. But though every body uses water, who can imagine that its constituents are two

gases—one highly inflammable and the other the supporter of combustion? Three forms of carbon are well known—charcoal, coal and diamond, but in combination with oxygen and hydrogen it produces thousands of different kinds of substances. Thus the same thing can manifest itself in many different forms. While the common man sees only plurality, the one who knows sees the diversity as well as the underlying unity.

Heat and light are normally latent in wood and oil but can be made manifest by suitable means. Energy also lies hidden in the hard core of atoms and can be brought out by very special means and under extraordinary conditions. The mere fact that we are unable to detect a certain thing by the means usually available to us does not necessarily mean that the thing does not exist. Many scientists have, therefore, begun to feel that life and consciousness exist in a latent but very minute form in a stone and in a piece of charcoal but our instruments are not yet sensitive enough to detect them.

An entire tree lies concealed in a seed—only waiting for favourable conditions to manifest itself. In fact, a single seed can evolve into whole forests—and any number of them. Is it surprising, then, that the Supreme Spirit, which is infinite, omnipotent and omniscient, has transformed itself into the entire universe, living as well as non-living?

The force of gravitation, which holds the universe together, is one of attraction and not of repulsion. The preservation and continuity of life are aided by love and not by enmity. Communities of plants and animals thrive best by mutual cooperation. Cooperation is thus seen to be the essential condition of all progress, in fact, the very law of life. And this could not be so but for the fact that all creatures are closely related, interdependent and inter-connected like cells in a vast organism, like members of the body of God, as taught in the Gita.

(VI/29, 30)

To give an indication of the way the minds of modern scientists are working, a few quotations are given below:

"The increasing knowledge of the chemistry of life", writes J. A. V. Butler in his book *Science and Human Life*, "also demonstrated the unit of life. So far from man being unique, his basic chemistry was the same not only as that of the higher animals but also as that of the lowest forms of life—worms,

fishes and even microorganisms. All living things are found to be made of similar material, organised in similar ways."

To quote again from G. R. Harrison's book *What Man May Be*, "There are millions of levels of being alive.... But the more closely one examines the border line between living and non-living matter, the more is one forced to conclude that there is no boundary that is definite, no place where a breath of life comes sharply to inform matter."

"An emotion or that which moves us, can be considered as a distilled essence arising from the interaction of molecules..."

In his book *Science and Human Life*, J. A. V. Butler writes: "Just as the mathematicians and physicists, in the analysis of matter, came in the end to think that their description of the material universe is more like pure thought than anything else, so in the analysis of living things, if we pursue it far enough, we find everywhere traces of feeling and sensation. This capability must be a basic property of the universe, a potentiality which existed from the start, but at present we are incapable of describing it further.

"So we arrive at a new monist view that matter and consciousness are two aspects of one phenomenon, but we do not say that either aspect is unimportant or insignificant, or to be explained away in terms of the other. What the phenomenon is and how the two aspects are connected with each other, are still a profound mystery."

In his book *Space, Time and Gravitation*, Sir Arthur Eddington writes: "All through the physical world runs that unknown content which must surely be the stuff of our consciousness; here is a hint of aspects deep within the world of physics, and yet unattainable by the methods of physics."

In his book *The Mysterious Universe* Sir James Jeans writes: "The universe can be pictured, although still very imperfectly and inadequately, as consisting of pure thought, the thought of what, for want of a wider word, we must describe as a mathematical thinker."

Elucidating his point in a later book *Physics and Philosophy* Sir James Jeans writes: "And now that we find we can best understand the course of events in terms of waves of knowledge, there is a certain presumption—although certainly no proof—that reality and knowledge are similar in their natures.

that reality is wholly mental...."

"When we view ourselves in space and time, our consciousnesses are obviously the separate individuals of a particle picture, but when we pass beyond space and time, they may perhaps form ingredients of a single continuous stream of life. As it is with light and electricity, so it may be with life; the phenomena may be individuals carrying on separate existences in space and time, while in the deeper reality beyond space and time we may all be members of one body."

When James Jeans, as a result of deep scientific thought, feels that we may all be members of one body, how close does he come to the vision of the Cosmic Form of the Lord described in Chapter XI of the Gita!

> Arjuna then saw in the person of that Supreme Deity, comprised in one limb, the whole universe divided into manifold parts.
> XI/13
>
> Lord, I behold in your body all gods and multitudes of different beings, Brahma perched on his lotus seat, Shiva and all Rishis and celestial Nagas.
> XI/15

Some years ago Julian Huxley, a distinguished biologist, wrote in his book *Religion without Revelation* "Science has gone a long way towards proving the essential unity of all phenomena. She has at least provided a very strong basis for a reasonable belief in this unity and continuity...there seems no escape from the belief that all reality has both a material and mental side, however rudimentary and below the level of anything like our consciousness that mental side may be.... In any case I believe in the unity of mind and matter in the one ultimate world-substance, as two of its aspects. Mental and material are thus, to my belief, but two aspects of one reality, two abstractions made by us from the concrete ground of experience; they cannot be separated, and it is false philosophy to try to think them apart."

More recently, J. B. S. Haldane, another eminent biologist, said in his lectures on the Unity and Diversity of Life: "I think that only two of the discoveries of this century in physics are of profound philosophical importance. One is Einstein's discovery that time and space are aspects of the same kind of

relationship. The other is that the distinction between two particles of the same kind is not absolute. We have not yet got the words to formulate this principle adequately. But it helps me to believe that the distinction between you and me, or the nearest mosquito and me, is nothing absolute either. . . . Any one who has the concrete and detailed notion of the unity of life, at which I have arrived after studying biology for sixty years, will at least have some respect for all life, including plant life...."

Haldane concluded his lectures on the following inspiring note: "On the walls of the large room in the zoological laboratory at Munster, where Professor Rensch keeps his living animals, are written the words 'Tat Twam Asi'. If I have helped any of you to understand some of the implications of this great saying, my lectures have not been in vain."

Once we accept that it is God who has transformed himself into the innumerable forms found in the world, we can easily derive from this fundamental truth the whole of a rational, scientific and universal religion—as Sri Krishna has already done for us in the Gita. For example, the following principles flow from the belief that God is the seed and substance of all creation:

(1) As God fills the earth and is all things, the world is essentially divine, holy and auspicious. It is a vast temple of God. Our sojourn on earth is a wonderful pilgrimage, a great privilege and opportunity to enjoy close and constant companionship with God, to live and move and have our being in God. Those who look upon the world as a vale of tears, a trap or a delusion, not only sour their lives but actually damn their Creator while professing to love and adore Him. True enough, there is a good deal of sorrow and suffering in the world, but much of it is due to man's own mistakes. If every one pursue the path of righteousness, pain and misery would practically disappear. For, assures Sri Krishna, the doer of good never comes to woe. (VI/40) But apart from this, pain is a powerful stimulator, in fact the greatest factor making for progress and evolution. It brings out hidden reserves of power and develops qualities essential for the growth of man. Pain is a necessary experience in life and even the best of men have suffered at times—perhaps for the sake of others or in order to set an example to others.

(2) The world, having been created by God, is His empire, His playground, His constant concern, His love and His delight. Therefore a lover of God must love the world and its inhabitants. He must rejoice in ceaselessly working for their good. He who lives for himself, whether in the world of matter or in the dreamland of the spirit, denies the Lord.

(3) As God is seated in the hearts of all beings, one indispensable requirement of godliness is to see and worship Him in His creatures. (VI/30, 31)

(4) As all creatures are manifestations of God and constituents of His universal body, they are interconnected and interdependent. You cannot hurt another without hurting God and eventually yourself. Nor can you do a good turn to another without benefiting God and ultimately yourself. You cannot serve God except by serving His creatures.

(5) As Ruler of the world, God is deeply interested in its maintenance and progress. All the work necessary or useful for the world is God's own work; and this must include not only prayer and meditation, religion and philosophy, but also science and technology, art and literature, state craft and defence, trade and industry, transport and communication, adventure and exploration. Whatever a man's profession, he can reach the Lord by doing his duty superbly, for performance of duty is tantamount to worship of God. (XVIII/46)

(6) God, as the father, mother, grandsire and friend of his creatures, is ever solicitous of their welfare. Therefore, whoever promotes their happiness quickly endears himself to the Lord. Whoever fails to do this or harms His creatures, incurs His displeasure.

(7) As father and mother of his creatures, God rejoices at all their attempts to accomplish difficult or noble tasks, even as a worldly father rejoices at his offspring's attempts to crawl or toddle or lisp. God watches with keen interest and pleasure man's efforts to reach the moon, to scale the highest peaks, to unveil the mysteries of nature, to explore unknown or inaccessible regions, to conquer disease and death.

The Law of Cooperation

According to the Gita all things, animate or inanimate, have

their existence in God; as such they are all like cells or members of the vast body of God, interconnected and interdependent. As a logical corollary to this theory of creation, the Gita has laid down for all creatures a principle of service, of cooperation, of mutual help and organised collective effort, which is at once the law of their life and growth and happiness. To designate this universal principle, the Gita has used three words, namely Yajna, Loka Sangraha and Karmaphala tyaga. Yajna is any action, specially, organised action, performed for the good of society. Loka Sangraha means working for the maintenance of the world or in order to set an example to others. Karmaphala tyaga, or the renunciation of the fruit of one's labours, means sharing with those less fortunate or using for their benefit whatever one has earned by the sweat of one's brow—knowledge, wealth, power, position or piety.

To emphasise the necessity for mutual help and cooperation Sri Krishna has taught this lesson repeatedly and in several ways, for example:

(1) Yajna or organised action for common weal is the sure way to the fulfilment of all one's desires as well as to God realisation. Nature showers its blessings on societies whose members adopt Yajna as their code of conduct. (III/10, 11, 12) Conversely, any one who appropriates all he gets but gives nothing to society is a thief and lives a life of sin. (III/12, 13, 16)

(2) Work for Loka Sangraha or world maintenance leads to spiritual perfection (III/20, 25). But if people do not engage in such work, the world would fall into ruin. (III/22-24)

(3) Renunciation of the fruit of one's labours is the most excellent of sadhanas and immediately leads to peace (XII/12). Pitiable are they who work for fruit (II/49).

(4) Rejoice in doing good to all creatures (V/25, XII/3, 4)

(5) Perform all your worldly actions as an offering to God. (IX/27)

(6) To enable the vast organism that is society to flourish each individual has his allotted duty. Every one by performing his own duty well worships the Lord. (XVIII/46)

This teaching of the Gita is directly opposed to Darwin's theory of the struggle for existence and the survival of the fittest and the views of many western philosophers of the nineteenth century. According to these thinkers civilisation has

advanced not by mutual help or cooperation but by conflict or competition, in other words, by the elimination of the weak by the strong. But this is now an exploded doctrine. As a result of recent researches in the fields of biology, physiology, psychology, psychiatry, etc., scientists have come to the definite conclusion that if struggle is the law of life, so is cooperation, and of the two cooperation, mutual help or organised effort is far more important and valuable for the maintenance and progress of mankind—in fact of any group of animals.

After a series of ingenious experiments in which cats and rats lived together, ate together, slept together and played together, Loh Seng Tsai (1952) came to this conclusion: "My observations throw overboard the traditional dogma in psychology that in animal nature there is an ineradicable instinct of pugnacity which makes fighting or wars inevitable...My experimental results give the death blow to any such fighting instinct theory."

Says P. R. Burkholders in *Cooperation and Conflict Among Primitive Organisms* "Though struggle, conflict and elimination have long been emphasised by the proponents of the Darwinian school, probably the most important basis for selection of fitness actually is the ability of associated components within organisms and in societies to work together harmoniously among themselves and in conformity to the physical environment."

In his revealing book *The Direction of Human Development* Ashley Montagu writes: "The tendentious habit of thinking of evolution in terms of the struggle for existence, by means of which, it is believed, the fittest are alone selected for survival while the weakest are ruthlessly condemned to extinction, is not only an incorrect view of the facts, but is a habit of thought which has done a considerable amount of harm. Certainly aggressiveness in many different forms exists in nature, but there also exists a concomitant healthy, non-ruthless competition and there also exist strong drives towards social and cooperative behaviour. These forces do not operate independently but together, as a whole, and the evidence strongly indicates that of all these drives the principle of cooperation is the most dominant, and biologically the most important. The coexistence of so many different species of animals throughout the world is a sufficient testimony to the importance of that

principle It is probable that man owes more to the operation of this principle than to any other in his biological and social evolution Indeed without this principle of cooperation, of so ciability and mutual aid, the progress of organic life, the improvement of the organism and the strengthening of the species, becomes incomprehensible"

In his book *The Evolution of Human Nature,* C J Herrick writes, "In terms of strict biological survival value, altruistic behaviour marks the highest level of cultural evolution"

Says Dr. Paul Chauchard, a French neurophysiologist and research scientist, "To keep the brain in equilibrium we must possess the morality of involvement and personal reflection in the service of what is human We can make ourselves sick by refusing to act like free men Evil, sin, vice, is a non human or sub human way of using the brain and leads to a kind of neurosis It wilfully imitates cerebral disintegration To love your neighbour as yourself is the best prescription for good cerebral equilibrium—the best use of the pre frontal lobe"

Sir Charles Sherrington, Nobel Prize winner in physiology, writes in his book *Man on His Nature* "Ours is a situation which transforms the human spirit's task, beyond recognition, to one of loftier responsibility We have, because human, an inalienable prerogative of responsibility which we cannot devolve, no, not as was once thought, even upon the stars We can share it only with each other'

Paul Campbell, in his book *Modernising Man* writes 'The more we unravel the mysteries of brain and body function, the more evident it becomes that we are built for moral evolution Neurological research has made it clear that for our brain—body mechanism to function normally we must accept high purpose and the highest standards of moral excellence Man evolves when he uses his brain for unselfish rather than selfish aims It means caring enough to have a strategy to meet the needs of the neighbours across the street, across the border and across the world'

Says Andre Gide "Man! The most complex of creatures, and for this reason the most dependent of creatures On everything that has formed you you depend Do not balk at this apparent slavery a debtor to many, you pay for your advantages by the same number of dependencies Understand that independence

is a form of poverty, that many things claim you, that many also claim kinship with you."

The eminent psychiatrist Alfred Adler wrote: "The individual's proper development can only progress if he lives and strives as a part of the whole.... I would go still further and show how all our functions are calculated to bind the single individual to the community and not to destroy fellowship of man with man...In seeing, hearing and speaking we bind ourselves to one another. Man only sees, hears and speaks rightly when he is linked to others by his interest in the external world.... When we speak of virtue we mean that a person plays his part; when we speak of vice we mean that he interferes with cooperation.... All the problems of human life demand capacity for cooperation and preparation for it...."

Summing up the modern point of view, W. C. Allee writes in his book *Cooperation Among Animals*: "After much consideration, it is my mature conclusion, contrary to Herbert Spencer, that the cooperative forces are biologically the more important and vital.... Despite many known appearances to the contrary, human altruistic drives are as firmly based on an animal ancestry as is man himself. Our tendencies towards goodness, such as they are, are as innate as our tendencies towards intelligence; we could do well with more of both."

The noted French scientist and philosopher, Pierre de Chardin, writes in his book *The Future of Man*: "We can progress only by uniting: this, as we have seen, is the law of life. But unification through coercion leads only to a superficial pseudo-unity. It may establish a mechanism, but it does not achieve any fundamental synthesis; and in consequence it endangers the growth of consciousness. It materialises, in short, instead of spiritualising. Only unification through unanimity is biologically valid. This alone can work the miracle of causing heightened personality to emerge from the forces of collectivity...." "As he awakens to a sense of 'universal unification' a wave of new life penetrates to the fibre and marrow of the least of his understandings, the least of his desires. Every thing glows, expands, is impregnated with an essential savour of the Absolute. Even more, everything is animated with a glow of Presence and Love...."

The Gita has emphatically declared that selfless work for the

good of society is the indispensable condition of survival an sure means of attaining success and happiness, peace an prosperity in life. It is the talisman that fulfils all desires. N one is exempt from the responsibility of promoting the welfar and development of his fellow men. The findings of moder science completely ditto this teaching of the Gita. United w stand, divided we fall, is a saying full of deep spiritua significance.

One Reality, Many Appearances

According to the second part of the famous dictum of Vedanta, the same reality is perceived differently by different wise people. This is a very important truth which has received full corroboration from modern science. Thus, as we have already seen, there are several different pictures of the world of matter, for example:

(1) The average person sees countless objects and substances.

(2) The chemist sees a few hundred thousand substances, each with its own separate molecule, reducible to ninety odd elements, each with its distinctive atom.

(3) The average physicist sees all matter as composed of electrons, protons and neutrons.

(4) The nuclear physicist sees these three fundamental particles being converted into radiant energy and into several kinds of unstable particles such as positrons and mesons.

(5) In addition, the new physics places before us two partial pictures — one in terms of particles, the other in terms of waves.

Neither individually nor collectively can these pictures tell the whole truth. But though imperfect, they are all useful and we turn to one or another according to the purpose we have in view.

Physicist Lecomte Du Nouy has stressed the same idea in his book *Human Destiny*. He says: "From the stand point of man it is the scale of observation which creates the phenomenon. Everytime we change the scale of observation we encounter new phenomena.

"On our scale of human observation, the edge of a razor

blade is a continuous line. On the microscopic scale, it is a broken but solid line. On the chemical scale we have atoms of iron and carbon. On the sub-atomic scale we have electrons in perpetual motion which travel at several thousand miles per second. All these phenomena are, in reality, the manifestations of the same basic phenomenon, the motions of the electrons. The only difference which exists between them is the scale of observation."

Since there can be many pictures of the reality it is wrong to insist that any one particular picture alone is true and there is nothing beyond it. The pictures that the human intellect can produce of the ultimate reality are all necessarily partial, incomplete and imperfect. Different pictures serve different purposes and are complementary. Each picture represents an aspect of the truth and is useful as far as it goes. But no one picture can take the place of the others or depict the truth in its entirety.

While observing gross things, people generally agree as to what they see. But when we come down to ultra microscopic or sub-atomic objects we find no such unanimity because the very process of observation changes the phenomenon which is being observed. This is the famous principle of indeterminacy enunciated by Werner Heisenberg, Nobel Laureate in physics. It means that whatever we may discover is but a partial image of the reality, a mere approximation to it, and that the whole or final truth is for ever beyond the reach of man. This is why the Vedas say, 'Neti, Neti' — "This is not the ultimate reality." "This is not the whole truth." Modern science has come to the same conclusion and in the words of Sir James Jeans: "In science a hypothesis can never be proved true. If it is negatived by future observations we shall know it is wrong, but if future observations confirm it we shall never be able to say it is right, since it will always be at the mercy of still further observations. A science which confines itself to correlating the phenomena can never learn anything about the reality underlying the phenomena, while a science which goes further than this, and introduces hypotheses about reality, can never acquire certain knowledge of a positive kind about reality; in whatever way we proceed, this is for ever denied us."

This principle of 'One reality, many appearances', valid in

the world of thought, becomes the great law of cooperation in the world of life. It means that things which are different are not necessarily hostile or contradictory. On the other hand, they may all be useful and necessary to one another as facets of the same reality or parts of one vast organism, as already explained.

The principle of "One reality, many appearances" may also be applied in reconciling the various interpretations which are usually placed on any religious teaching. For it suggests that the different interpretations may all be correct, useful and in fact necessary for different people according to their individual requirements, tastes and temperaments.

There is a beautiful story in the Upanishads which brings this out. Once gods, demons and men all went to the Creator for advice. The Creator, Prajapati, gave them all the same cryptic advice — the one syllable 'da'. The gods said, "We love pleasure. So Brahma, by the sound da has advised us to practise 'damana' (self control)". The demons said, "We danavas are very prone to anger and cruelty. So our Great father has advised us by the sound 'da' to cultivate 'daya', that is compassion." The men said, "We men are very greedy and mad after amassing wealth. Obviously, through 'da', Prajapati wants us to practise 'dana', that is charity or giving of alms." As they could not agree about the meaning of their common Progenitor's all too brief direction, they approached him for a clarification, and to their surprise he approved of all their different interpretations, because they had each arrived at their meaning in good faith and in the light of their own requirements.

The remarkable thing in this parable is that the Creator, who was the author of the aphorism, himself accepted all the three interpretations, though different from one another, as correct. The moral of this story is that the same religious teaching may be interpreted in several different ways — all valid and useful. One reason for the variations is given in the parable itself, namely the different needs and experiences of different people. Another reason, not explicit but still very important. is that any interpretation is good only to the extent that it is actually put into practice. A second rate interpretation which is applied in daily life will do far more good than a first rate interpretation that remains confined to the intellect.

Since the world as we know it is a panorama of pictures, which are different from the reality, some people regard it as a mere dream or illusion, an impediment in the path or at best a futility. This, however, is an error. For the pictures and appearances belong to the reality and not to something else. As partial representations of the reality they are not false or non-existent. Some may think that they conceal the truth, but truly speaking they are revelations or glimpses of the truth. The art of life consists in seeing the truth amid such pictures of it as we find around us. How wonderful they are inspite of all their seeming imperfections! Though the reality is superior to any of its representations, the latter are not to be despised, for they are our nearest approximations and stepping stones to the reality. We have to live with them, learn from them and find our way to perfection through them and with their help. The world of phenomena, however different from the world of reality, is not only our abode and training ground but also our only means of getting at the reality.

The world is as real as our own hunger and thirst. There is no other way to God than in and through His creation. The Ideal, the Spirit and the distant goal have to be pursued. But in doing so we cannot afford to ignore the demands of the actual, the momentary and the material, for they are the forms in which the Reality generally appears to us. There can be no hope of reaching God if the world and its requirements are regarded as unreal.

Manifest and Unmanifest

Many people, though they professedly believe in the omnipresence of God, do so with mental reservations because they cannot reconcile themselves with the idea that the Almighty and all knowing God can be present in inanimate objects or in such weak and wicked creatures as we are. Thus the famous Christian prayer, known as the Lord's Prayer, is addressed to 'Our Father who art in heaven'. Everywhere conventional religion teaches that God is unmanifest and, conversely, whatever is manifest, that is to say, the entire creation, is distinct and separate from God and, therefore, God is to be found not in the world, not in family and friends, not in common toil

or struggle, not in the din and bustle of the market place, but only in religious practices, in the silence of a sylvan solitude, in the chamber of one's own heart or in a paradise far, far away.

As a matter of fact common folk all over the world believe that God is Absolute, Unmanifest and entirely dissociated from his creation. Their basic idea is that the earth is not the home or kingdom of God but of Mammon and that success and happiness can be had in the world only by following its ruler, Mammon. As a logical corollary, if a man wants to follow God he must quit the world and its activities. In other words, one must make a definite choice between God and the world. Thinking people all over the world, specially in the west, are turning away from God, because as they rightly argue, if God is not in the world He can be nowhere. Since the world is a hard, ever present and inescapable reality, they have elected the world and put aside God. On the other hand, many Hindus, with their old traditions of God absorption, have been making fruitless efforts to shun the world in order to find God. Their attempts to seek God outside the world are naturally failures; by denying the God in man and Nature they are neither true men of God nor good citizens; they get the worst of both the worlds.

In drawing attention to this mistaken antithesis C. G. Jung says, "When the primitive world disintegrated into spirit and nature, the West rescued nature for itself. It was prone to a belief in nature, and only became the more entangled in it with every painful effort to make itself spiritual. The East, on the contrary, took mind for its own, and by explaining away matter as mere illusion (maya), continued to dream in Asiatic filth and misery. But since there is only one earth and one mankind, East and West cannot rend humanity into two different halves. Psychic reality exists in its original oneness and awaits man's advance to a level of consciousness where he no longer believes in one part and denies the other, but recognises both as constituent elements of one psyche."

Thousands of years ago the Gita anticipated these difficulties and removed this dualism between Spirit and Nature, the manifest and unmanifest. For what is manifest is only a manifestation of God and derived from him. To Sri Krishna belongs the unique distinction of teaching that God fills the universe,

all creatures good and bad and their thoughts and activities are expressions of the Divine and his energy. The cosmos is the embodiment of God and there can be no way to the Supreme Spirit except through his body, the manifest universe. Sri Krishna, therefore, unhesitatingly advocates the pursuit of the Lord manifest in his creation. Purushottama, the highest concept of God, according to Sri Krishna, is both personal and impersonal, nature and spirit, absolute and relative, unmanifest and also manifest throughout his creation. The Purushottama incorporates and reconciles all these seemingly contradictory features and yet is greater than any and all of them. He is not identical with cosmos, but infinitely greater: nor does he perish when all creation perishes. The entire universe represents but an infinitesimal part of his glory and power. The Purushottama or the Person Supreme, Divine, is not a personal God for he is not limited to any particular body or form, but fills all objects and creatures and space. Though limitless, unthinkable and quiescent in one aspect, yet he assumes many finite forms and ever remains active, watchful, solicitous for the welfare of his creatures and ready to intervene for the preservation of the world order. Purushottama is greater than the Absolute and unmanifest as well as the manifest, just as the whole is greater than any of its parts.

Man's concept of God largely determines his manner of worshipping Him. Those who regard God as wholly or largely Unmanifest worship Him by means of prayer, ceremonial worship, meditation, study of scriptures, repetition of His name and other religious exercises. Those who acknowledge only the Manifest worship Him in the form of an image, symbol, holy book, prophet or saint or they ignore God altogether and concern themselves only with their daily round of duties. Those who, following Sri Krishna, believe that God is both Manifest and Unmanifest recognise that the various modes of worship, meditation, study of scriptures and even image worship are helpful to the aspirant and acceptable to the Lord, but need to be supplemented with loving and selfless service of His innumerable creatures on earth. Not a mere fraction but the whole of life must be made an adoration of the Lord (VI/30, 31; XIII/27; III/19; IX/27 and XVIII/46).

This lesson cannot be repeated too often, for despite Sri

Krishna's teaching the belief persists that what is material cannot be spiritual, what is pleasant cannot be good, what is easy cannot be the way to perfection and the harder the path, the greater the achievement to which it leads. Many people succumb to the lure of the Unmanifest simply because it is subtler and more difficult than the Manifest. No doubt the saints and seers who lead a life of self-denial, renouncing all mundane interests, are benefactors of humanity. By engaging in spiritual research they and their disciples place mankind under a deep debt of gratitude. But the way followed by them, though very noble and laudable, is extremely difficult and God has very wisely made it so, because if the masses could take to the path of the Absolute or the Unmanifest, the world would soon fall into ruin. The pursuit of the Manifest God — seeing, loving and serving God in all creatures, specially in all human beings — is not only the easier but also the better path, in fact the only path for the common man. It develops the whole man and unites his entire personality with God through thought, word and deed.

Gita — The Book of Life

Earlier the message of the Gita was described as the religion of science. As a matter of fact the Gita is not so much a book of religion as of life, for its interest extends to the entire life and all the activities of man. While other teachers may be satisfied with brief moments of communion or partial union with God, the Gita has consistently insisted on constant or perpetual Yoga, for example
Sri Krishna says :

> Therefore at all times remember Me and fight. VIII/7
> Therefore at all times be established in Yoga. VIII/27
> Have your mind constantly fixed on Me. XVIII/57

The Gita requires the aspirant not only to divinise all his life and character but also to acquire excellence, and if possible superexcellence, in his profession (II/50, III/8, 9 and 25; and Chapter X).

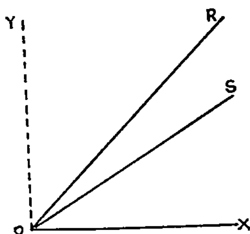
Le Comte du Nouy writes in his book *Human Destiny*,

"A great prelate, Dr. William Temple, Archbishop of Canterbury, Primate of England, dared to write, 'It is a great mistake to suppose that God is only or even chiefly concerned with religion'." As God is the maker and ruler of the world, the range of His interests must obviously encompass all the business of the world and the departments of His Government must include not only prayer, worship and religious exercises but also the other multifarious activities necessary or useful for the world. Therefore, says the Gita, whoever is engaged in any work directly or indirectly beneficial to society is a servant of the Lord, he worships the Lord and attains the highest perfection by performing his duties devotedly and efficiently.

> He from whom all beings arise, by whom all this is pervaded, by worshipping Him through the performance of his own duty, man attains perfection.
> XVIII/46

Pierre de Chardin, physicist and philosopher, has stated the problem in his book *The Future of Man* in the following words:

> "For the spiritually minded whether in the East or the West, one point has hitherto not been in doubt that Man could only attain to a fuller life by rising 'vertically' above the material zones of the world. Now we see the possibility of an entirely different line of progress. The Higher Life, the Union, the long-dreamed of consummation that has hitherto been sought above, in the direction of some kind of transcendency; should we not rather look for it Ahead, in the prolongation of the inherent forces of evolution?
> "Above or ahead — or both?
> "This is the question that must be forced upon every human conscience by our increasing awareness of the tide of anthropogenesis on which we are borne. It is, I am convinced, the vital question, and the fact that we have thus far left it unconfronted is the root cause of all our religious troubles; whereas as answer to it, which is perfectly possible, would mark a decisive advance on the part of Mankind towards God. That is the heart of the problem."



The solution which Chardin has proposed is an integration of these two kinds of activities, OY leading upward and God-ward and OX leading forward and making for material progress, by representing them as acting at right angles to each other. When these two activities are combined the resultant is OR, which, in the words of Chardin is "not a half measure, a compromise between Heaven and Earth, but a resultant combining and fortifying each through the other. . . ."

In an all embracing synthesis the Gita has propounded the revolutionary idea that any duty performed efficiently amounts to worship of God. Since all the work of the world is God's own work, one can reach Him whether one proceeds by OX, OY, OR or OS. Worldly works and spiritual works are not intrinsically different in character or mutually incompatible. Like matter and energy, both are equivalent, interchangeable and complementary. Both are manifestations of the same divine energy, both are indispensable for the maintenance and evolution of the individual as well as society. Both have in them the power to sanctify life and make a man an image of God. Constructed as the world is, material needs absorb the bulk of a man's time and energy and so there must be a way by which, while meeting these needs of himself and of society, man could also accomplish all-round development and reach the fulfilment of his life. Certainly there is a way and this way is shown by the Gita: Do all your work enthusiastically, efficiently, selflessly and for the welfare of the world. Share liberally with others whatever you acquire as a result of your labours. Every duty performed in this spirit is an adoration of God. But all works, including religious, have to be performed in this spirit. No activity, which ignores the welfare of society, can ultimately benefit the individual. Even religious works will degrade a man if their sole or primary objective is self-aggrandisement. So long as large parts of a

man's personality or life are engrossed in the pursuit of selfish ends, he must be considered imperfect. Prayer, meditation and other religious practices will help him, but he must also make a determined effort to purify and ennoble his whole life.

2. Yoga

Its Significance

The Gita is a scripture of Yoga. Yoga is the burden of its song. It is the term which occurs most frequently in the text. In the colophon all chapters have been given the general name of Yoga Shastra; while each individual chapter has been separately designated as Yoga of some kind or other. Thus the first chapter is called the yoga of the Dejection of Arjuna while the fifteenth is named Purushottama Yoga or the yoga of the Supreme Self. In this way, corresponding to each of its chapter headings, the Gita speaks of eighteen different kinds of yoga, besides some others mentioned in the text, for example Buddhi Yoga, Abhyasa yoga and Ananya Yoga. Sri Krishna is described as Yogeshwar, the master of all Yogas. He called upon Arjuna several times, in direct terms, to become a yogi, for example in verses 48 and 50 of Chapter II and verse 46 of Chapter VI.

Yoga epitomises the teaching of the Gita. It is therefore necessary to understand clearly the meaning of this word, which in a way holds the key to this great scripture.

The word yoga, as commonly used in the Gita, means: (1) to join or unite (with God); (2) the state of union or fellowship with God; and (3) any circumstance, means or exercise which leads to or facilitates such union. Thus yoga, in the terminology of the Gita, is very comprehensive and includes all the steps and sadhanas which a man may use in order to get nearer to God, to cultivate godly qualities and actions, to become more and more like God and worthy of His grace. The underlying idea is that God is the source of all wisdom, power and goodness and when we join up our petty self with Him, His divine qualities begin to flow into us, making our lives richer, sweeter and nobler.

To bring home the significance of this vital concept of yoga

the views of some well-versed thinkers are given below. D. S. Sarma writes in *The Pearls of Wisdom*:

"The Gita calls itself a yoga shastra. The message it delivers is called yoga. The Avatar who delivers the message is termed Yogeshwara and the man who accepts the message and acts according to it is called a yogi. Therefore the word yoga is the key to the Gita. This word is used in its primary sense of union and not in the secondary sense of thought control as in Patanjali. The English word Yoke and the Sanskrit word yoga are cognate terms. Yoga thus means yoking together. In the Gita it is largely used in the sense of fellowship with God.

"The opposite of yoga is Sanga. If yoga means union with God, sanga means attachment to the world. And if a man who is in fellowship with God is called a Yukta, a man who is attached to the world is called a sakta. The whole object of the Gita may be said to be to convert a Sakta into a Yukta, to convert a man of the world into a man of God. Sakta and Yukta are poles asunder, and the entire path of spiritual discipline lies between them."

Tilak says: "In the Gita the word 'Yoga', 'Yogi' or other compounds from the word 'yoga', have occurred about 80 times. But nowhere except in at most four or five places has it been used in the meaning of Patanjala Yoga. (Gita VI/12 and 23)

"The word yoga has been used in the Gita in three or four places to signify the divine skill or wonderful power of the Blessed Lord in creating the variegated perceptible creation and on that account the Blessed Lord has been referred to as Yogeshwara. But this is not the principal meaning of the word yoga in the Gita. Therefore, this word has intentionally been clearly defined in the Gita itself as: "Yoga Karmasa kaushalam" (Gita II/50), i.e., Yoga means some special skill, device, intelligent method or graceful way of performing actions; and in the Shankar Bhashya on this phrase, it has been interpreted as meaning "the device of eliminating the natural tendency of Karma to create bondage."

Sri Aurobindo's illuminating explanation of the term yoga as used in the Gita is given below:

"Oneness with God, oneness with all beings, the realisation of the eternal divine unity everywhere and the drawing

onwards of men towards that oneness are the law of life which arises from the teachings of the Gita. There can be none greater, wider, more profound. Liberated oneself, to live in this oneness, to help mankind on the path that leads towards it and meanwhile to do all works to which he is called, no greater or more liberal rule of divine works can be given.... To be made one self with God above and God in man and God in the world is the sense of liberation and the secret of perfection."

The reader will note the great emphasis Sri Aurobindo has placed on the threefold character of Yoga — union with God above, union with God in man and union with God in the world.

The idea of establishing union with God finds an echo all over the world. Thus O. S. Marden writes in the *Miracle of Right Thought*: "Just in proportion as we realise this oneness with the Divine, this at-one-ment with our Maker, do our lives become calm, confident, creative.... All our troubles come from our sense of separateness from the Infinite source.... This is the secret of all healing, of all health, prosperity and happiness, *the conscious union with the Divine*."

In his book *In Tune with the Infinite*, R. W. Trine says: "We can bring our minds into rapport, into such harmony and connection with the infinite Divine power, that it speaks to us, directs us, and therefore acts through us as our own very selves. Through this connection, we become illumined by Divine wisdom and we become energised by Divine Power. It is ours then to act under the guidance of this higher wisdom, and in all forms of expression, in every act of life, to live and to work augmented by this higher power. The finite thereby becomes the channel through which the Infinite can and does work."

"Religion," writes Winfred Rhoades in his book *The Self You have to Live With*, is intrinsically not a belief, not a doctrine, not the practice of certain acts; but conscious association with the Divine Spirit and Life.... The habit of living consciously with God can give strength for enduring what has to be endured, energy for going forward when the going is hard, further insight into that which is true and desirable, wisdom for the planning of one's ways and the

choosing of one's path, and inspiration for the heroic and victorious living of life."

Varieties of Yoga

We may now turn to the question why the Gita has propounded so many different kinds of yoga and for this purpose we may consider, as a sample, the title of the first chapter, namely the Yoga of the Dejection of Arjuna. The title is appropriate because the despondency of Arjuna became the cause of the spiritual advancement not only of himself but of entire humanity. It was the sorrow of Arjuna which gave the world the priceless treasure of the Gita. Sorrow or dejection is, of course, not to be sought or practised as a means of union with God; there is already too much of it in the world and there is no need to add to it for the sake of spiritual progress. But when sorrow, disappointment or sickness comes into a man's life, it can be handled in either of two ways. It may be used to bring out his hidden reserves of power and lead him to greater achievements or it can be allowed to pull him deeper into the slough of despondency. In the former case, as pointed out by Sri Yogeshwarji in his discourses, the sorrow would be really a blessing in disguise; it will be a 'yoga', as it was with Arjuna. Innumerable examples can be cited to show how feelings of inferiority, physical disability, sickness, bereavement, loss of wealth and prosperity and repeated failures have all prompted men and women to make redoubled efforts to compensate for their loss or deficiency and thereby led to a transformation of their lives and even the progress of civilisation. How many have owed all their wonderful spiritual achievements to a domestic tragedy! It would be appreciated that sorrow does not automatically act as a catalytic agent to bring about upliftment. Quite a few people quickly go under at the first shock of a misfortune or calamity. Sorrow can become yoga or lead to progress only if tackled with intelligence and determination. As Dale Carnegie says, "if you have a lemon, make a lemonade." If you are faced with any kind of trouble, turn your thoughts to God for help and guidance and attack your problems afresh.

It would be wrong to suppose that only sorrow, pain or

privation can lead to yoga; that a life of poverty is necessary for spiritual advancement. On the contrary, a comfortable life, free from financial and other worries, should normally be more conducive to a man's all-round development. As a matter of fact, any circumstance of life, any situation that may confront him, any work he may be required to do, even sorrow and suffering, can provide the occasion and the impulse for yoga if he follows the proper technique. And the exposition of this technique is the heart of the Gita's teaching.

Constant Yoga

Thus there are as many kinds of yoga as there are situations, incidents or actions in life. This may seem a phantastic idea; nevertheless it is the very corner-stone of the Gita's philosophy of life. Although the Gita speaks of yoga and yukta (that is, one engaged in yoga or treading the path of yoga), the highest ideal placed by it before mankind, as pointed out by Sri Aurobindo, D. S. Sarma and others is that of Nitya yukta or Satat yukta, that is one who is in constant union with God. In other words, the union with God should not be confined to moments of prayer and meditation, but should be a constant sub-conscious or conscious feeling. The aspirant should be able to enjoy fellowship with God and live under His inspiration at all times and not merely during the brief periods of spiritual elevation. To quote Sri Aurobindo, "The essential condition is the constant undeviating memory of the Divine in life, even in action and battle — mam anusmara yudhya cha — and the turning of the whole act of living into an uninterrupted yoga, nitya yoga. Whoever does that finds Me easy to attain, says the Godhead; he is the great soul who reaches the supreme perfection."

The reader is requested to see, by way of example, verses VII/17, VIII/14, IX/14, 22, X/10 and XII/2. Sri Krishna himself has clarified this in unmistakable terms when he says:

> Therefore *at all times* think upon Me only and fight. VIII/7
> Therefore, O Arjuna, be steadfast in yoga *at all* times.
> VIII/27
>
> Mentally renouncing all deeds to Me, having Me as the

highest goal, resorting to Buddhi yoga, do you *ever* fix your mind on Me. XVIII/57

We are all too familiar with examples of people who practise partial or part-time yoga, who devote some time daily to religious practices but during the remainder indulge freely in anti-social or immoral activities aimed at self-gratification or self-aggrandisement. Sri Ramakrishna Paramhansa has very aptly described the state of such people in the following words:

"A fly sits now on sacramental food and next on filth. But the case of the bee is different. It sits on a blossom or on a hive and nowhere else. The worldly minded sadhakas are like the house fly and the Paramhansas like the bee. The former are occasionally devoted and the latter ever devoted to the Lord."

It will always be a big question mark whether people engaged in partial yoga, in view of their split personalities, will have made any spiritual headway at all at the end of a given period of time. Unfortunately such people are on the increase in our country at the present time, because the necessity of becoming a whole time yogi is so little understood or taught. Be that as it may, part time yoga is not the ideal placed by the Gita before mankind.

Sacred and Secular

The Gita repeatedly urges that the whole of one's life and one's entire personality, including the intellect, the heart and the will, in fact everyone of its components, should be made divine or dedicated to God. And this presupposes that not only certain special actions like religious sadhanas, but all the varied activities of the world should have in them the potentiality of taking a man God-ward, of making him God-like. Sri Krishna has emphasised this throughout the Gita and in his final talk he says:

> Man reacheth the highest perfection by each being intent on his own duty (Karma). XVIII/45
> He from whom is the evolution of all beings, by whom all this is pervaded, by worshipping Him with his own duty a man winneth perfection. XVIII/46

The teacher by his teaching, the doctor by his healing, the workman by looking after machines, the administrator by managing his department or concern, the shoe-maker by mending shoes — efficiently and in the proper spirit — all perform yoga no less effective than the special sadhanas like japa and meditation which alone are popularly believed to be aids to yoga. As a matter of fact, when carried out with the correct attitude of mind, even such acts as eating and recreation become Yoga. Proper attention to worldly duties can quicken spiritual progress as successfully as the direct observance of religious practices. There need be no antagonism between the proper performance of social and professional obligations on one hand and religious sadhanas on the other. But of the two the former is the more essential for man's evolution, being the foundation not only of all sadhana but of life itself.

This idea has been stressed recently by many saints and seers. Thus Sister Nivedita wrote in inspiring words: "Work is as necessary to the growth of the soul as is the Vedanta; perhaps more so. And work is at all times within our own power. The Bhakta practises the ceremonies of worship. Work is the puja which a man offers to that Great Power which is manifested as Nature."

• • •

"If the many and the one be indeed the same Reality, then it is not all modes of worship alone, but equally all modes of work, all modes of struggle, all modes of creation, which are paths of realisation. No distinction henceforth between sacred and secular. To labour is to pray. To conquer is to renounce. Life is itself religious. To have and to hold is as stern a trust as to quit and to avoid.... To Vivekananda, the workshop, the study, the farmyard and the field are as true and fit scenes for the meeting of God with man as the cell of the monk or the door of the temple. To him there is no difference between service of man and worship of God, between manliness and faith, between true righteousness and spirituality."

• • •

"Does it matter that instead of offering worship, we are to turn henceforth with gifts of patient service, of food, of training, of knowledge to those who are in sore need? If 'All that exists is One', then all paths alike are paths to that Oneness. Fighting is worship as good as praying. Labour is offering as acceptable as Ganges water. Study is austerity more costly and more precious than a fast. Mutual aid is better than any puja."

Swami Chidbhavananda has expressed the same thought in the following words: "It is customary with people to divide human activities into two distinctive types—the spiritual and the temporal, the sacred and the secular. But the Bhagavad Gita makes no such artificial distinction. Life pertaining to this world is in no way different from the spiritual... Action by itself is neither sacred nor secular. The attitude with which it is performed brings about a magical change in it. All the actions become sacred in the hands of a spiritual man. On the contrary, a man with a material outlook drags down even a sacred act to a vulgar plane. Because of his earth-bound outlook the uninitiated one fouls sacred acts into secular, whereas the message of the Gita is to metamorphose all actions into liberating, sacred ones."

Thus the yoga which the Gita teaches and requires us to practise at all times is not to be sought in some Himalayan cave or forest hermitage. It is available to each one of us here and now—wherever we may be—in the form of the duty which is nearest to us or calls for our most urgent attention, for example our professional, social or domestic responsibilities, our national or local problems, or the needs of individuals or institutions for help, guidance or encouragement. All the tasks of life, all good causes, provide a man with opportunities to establish whole-time union with God, to link his own petty self with the Supreme self. And how may common everyday actions of life be transformed into yoga? The Gita suggests a very simple way, and this is, perhaps, its greatest contribution to the philosophical thought of the world. Do whatever you do with the utmost efficiency and enthusiasm but in a selfless spirit, for the collective good; regard yourself as an employee of God's government; consider whatever you get as a result of your labours as a gift of God and while meeting your own needs properly, share it liberally with those who need it. In this way every action of

yours will become an act of consecration or sacrifice and your entire life will become a constant yoga.

Definition of Yoga

The Gita itself has defined yoga in three places. In chapter II verse 50, yoga is defined as skill in action; in the 48th verse of the same chapter it is defined as evenness of mind; and according to the 23rd verse of the sixth chapter yoga is the disconnection from union with pain.

At first sight these three definitions may seem to be at variance with one another, but in reality they are not so. The first definition of yoga as skill in action or the true art of working, describes the means or the way of yoga. The second, even mindedness or equality, represents partly the means and partly accomplishment. Evenness of mind is necessary for the practice of yoga and as a man progresses in yoga he becomes better established in equality, for he begins to see God everywhere, in all things and events. The third definition, disconnection from union with pain, gives the starting point as well as the final aim or fruit of yoga. Pain urges a man to resort to yoga and when he is accomplished in yoga he is rid of all pain and enjoys supreme bliss.

Therefore yoga as a form of sadhana boils down to skilful action. In other words, yoga = action + skill of a certain type. Any action is capable of being transformed into yoga. For purposes of yoga it is not necessary to pick and choose among the varieties of activities open to humanity. But no action by itself can become yoga—unless it is performed with the requisite skill. Likewise skill alone, mere knowledge of the supreme Reality, or even knowledge of the technique of yoga or the ability to do the particular work superbly, is not yoga—unless it is accompanied by effort. Those who have mastered the theory but do nothing to translate it into accomplishment are not practising yoga—in the sense in which the term has been used in the Gita.

And what is the skill that transforms Karma into yoga? Of course the work must fulfil the material requirements of efficiency, such as accuracy, minimum expenditure of time, energy and money. At the same time it must also be done in a selfless

spirit renouncing the sense of doership as well as the fruit and without being deterred by pleasure or pain, success or failure. If these spiritual conditions are not fulfilled, the work will not become yoga, however, successful it might be in the material sense. Likewise any work done half-heartedly, in a slip-shod or dilatory manner or without due regard to economy, cannot be said to be done skilfully and cannot therefore come up to the standard of yoga, even though it may appear quite satisfactory from the purely spiritual point of view. But more about yoga later on.

3. Desires

Importance of Desirelessness

Apart from "Yoga", desire is another word which occurs very frequently in the Gita. Man is repeatedly enjoined to control his desires, whether his aim is to become a 'Sthita Prajna', 'Bhakta', 'Jnani', 'Yogi' or 'Gunatita'. This is well brought out in the following verses:

> When a man abandoneth, O Partha, all the desires of the heart and is satisfied in the Self by the Self, then is he called stable in mind. II/55
>
> He attaineth peace into whom all desires flow as rivers flow into the ocean, which is filled with water but remaineth unmoved—not he who desireth enjoyment. II/70
>
> Whoso forsaketh all desires and goeth onwards free from yearnings, selfless and without egoism—he attaineth peace. II/71
>
> Whose works are all free from the moulding of desire, whose actions are burned up by the fire of wisdom, him the wise have called a sage. IV/19
>
> He should be known as a perpetual ascetic who neither hateth nor desireth, free from the pairs of opposites, O mighty armed, he is easily set free from bondage. V/3
>
> He who is able to endure here on earth, ere he is liberated from the body, the force born from desire and passion, he is a Yogi, he is a happy man. V/23

To those wise men, who are free from desire and anger, who have subdued their mind and have realised God, Brahma, the abode of eternal peace, is present all round. V/26

I am the strength of the strong devoid of desire and passion. In beings I am desire not contrary to Dharma, O best of the Bharatas. VII/11

There are a number of other verses dealing with the topic of 'Desires'. For example the reader may see II/56, 62; III/37-39, 43; VI/24, 25; XIV/12; XV/5; XVI/10, 11, 16, 23; XVII/11, 12, 17; and XVIII/23, 24, 49, 53 and 54.

From these verses it is clear that the Gita attaches very great importance to the conquest of desire as a preparation for the attainment of eternal bliss or the Supreme Lord. It is, therefore, necessary to understand what desirelessness actually means and how it is to be attained in practical life.

Meaning of Desirelessness

According to some commentators the Gita requires all desires to be eliminated. But this is not a correct view. In fact, Sri Krishna himself has clarified this by saying, "In beings I am desire not contrary to Dharma." (VII/11) Thus while dissociating himself from desires which are contrary to righteousness, the Lord has openly identified himself with—and thereby given his hearty blessings to—all desires for the good of the individual as well as society, provided such desires do not conflict with the larger good of humanity. Again, in verse V/23 he has made it clear that the aim of life is not to kill all desires but to regulate and control them judiciously. There are a number of other verses where Sri Krishna has elaborated and confirmed these ideas. Thus he says that he is manliness in men (VII/8), prosperity of the prosperous (X/23, 34), strength of the strong devoid of anger and passion (VII/11) and intelligence of the intelligent (VII/10). In verse X/34 Sri Krishna has described himself as fame, prosperity, speech, intelligence etc; and in verse X/36 as the glory of the glorious, victory of the victorious, resolution of the resolute and goodness of the good-natured. Summing up his divine glories, he says that anyone who is glorious, brilliant or powerful is a manifestation of a spark of

divine effulgence. It is a laudable ambition to cultivate and exemplify such divine qualities.

As a little reflection will show, a state of complete desirelessness is impossible to realise, and even if it were possible it is doubtful if it will be desirable. Man cannot live without desires even for a day, as no activity is possible without the prompting of desire. An engineer who is required to build a bridge will naturally desire to raise a strong and handsome structure, as economically and speedily as possible. If he does not lay down targets for himself and his assistants, he may not be able to keep to schedule or turn out efficient work. The same applies to all professions—teaching, medicine, technology, industry, or administration. How can any one do his work properly unless he is motivated by ambition and desire, unless he has aims, targets and plans? This shows that the goal of desirelessness is not to be taken literally. Moreover, elsewhere in the scriptures man has been exhorted to strive for the fourfold objectives of Artha (wealth), Dharma (righteousness), Kama (desire) and Moksha (liberation). Moreover, the Gita also recognises devotees who seek from the Lord the fulfilment of their noble desires. (VII/16)

In giving this interpretation I have followed several eminent commentators. Thus in verses II/55 and II/71 Madhavacharya has translated Kama as prohibited desires. Sri Aurobindo has urged the elimination of self-ful desires. Mahatma Gandhi called his commentary on the Gita the Gospel of Selfless, and not desireless, Action. According to Rajagopalachari "what we should renounce is not action but selfish desire. We should liberate our activities from the bondage of selfish purpose. The essence of sacrifice is . . . the giving up of selfish desires." The views of Dr. Radhakrishnan are identical.

The usual explanation for the origin of the world is that when God felt a desire to become manifold and manifest Himself through creation, the universe came into being. Likewise each human being creates his own little world through his desires. A man's dominant desires are one of the important factors which bring about his rebirth and determine his environment, temperament and physical and mental endowment in the next life. Desires are also the primary cause of the differences we see between man and man. The higher and purer a man's

desires, the nobler and happier his life. The entire creation is, in fact, a play of desires and it is impossible to conceive of a world without desires.

Since every one must have desires of some kind or other and since life cannot go on without them, it is obvious that the ideal of desirelessness does not require a total annihilation of all desires but rather their judicious pruning, redirection and control.

It is possible to classify desires into several categories. For example, a man may desire to hurt another for no rhyme or reason, though he thereby does not benefit himself or perhaps even harms himself. Next come desires by which an individual seeks to advance his own interests, wealth or position regardless of what it may cost others. Then there are desires whose object is just pleasure seeking, which may harm the individual but not necessarily others; and of course there are many innocent pleasures which make life enjoyable without harming any one. The highest type of desires are those in which the ultimate aim is to serve or benefit society. As examples may be cited desires for self-improvement, to acquire knowledge or skill, wealth, power or position in order to serve mankind, to alleviate suffering, to extend the frontiers of knowledge or to make life easier or more enjoyable for others. Obviously, it is desires which are self-centred or evil, harmful to others or beneficial to a few at the expense of many, which need to be got rid of. On the other hand, desires to promote the welfare or happiness of the people have to be nurtured and strengthened by constant and determined effort. This is the meaning of the scriptural advice to pursue Dharma, Artha, Kama and Moksha. This is also the real intention of the Gita, as explained above.

How to Control Desires?

There are three principal ways of controlling desires: suppression, catharsis and sublimation.

All evil or antisocial desires have to be suppressed, for example those to deceive others, to commit thefts, to take bribes etc. The aspirant has to be particularly vigilant on this point. He should not flirt with temptation when it comes in the form of an innocent looking, coy and tiny fay, knowing full well

that with a little encouragement it will soon grow into an uncontrollable monster.

Man has many instinctive desires or wants—such as those for food, comfort, sex, self-importance etc. They represent the vital bodily and emotional needs of man and are indispensable for the maintenance of the individual as well as society. To satisfy them, in moderation, is innocuous, nay necessary and useful, but harmful if carried to excess. In the case of bulk of mankind such desires cannot be completely rooted out but are best handled by judicious gratification—that is gratification with self-control and with a recognition that the pleasure they give is fleeting and that excessive indulgence may prove harmful in many ways. By balanced gratification and control most people ultimately lose all taste for them. This is the method of catharsis, and it is obvious that constituted as man is, many of his natural or instinctive wants have to be dealt with in this manner. According to modern psychologists any attempt at wholesale repression of any of these wants is like trying demolish a brick wall with one's head. And thousands of years ago Sri Krishna gave the same advice when he said,

> Even a wise man behaves in conformity with his own nature;
> beings follow nature; what shall restraint avail? III/33

It is, however, necessary to realise the limitations and dangers of catharsis. If a man uses his better judgement or discrimination, repeated satisfaction usually blunts the edge of the desire. But he should remember that sometimes enjoyment has a contrary effect and the appetite grows with indulgence. So he should not allow his desire for pleasure to get the better of him.

The third and best method of dealing with desires is that of sublimation—the substitution of higher and nobler ways of satisfaction for lower ones. Human desires are mostly variants of the natural instincts which have constituted man's emotional heritage since the beginning of creation. These natural wants are common to all mankind, but their strength may vary from man to man. Individuals also differ widely in regard to the mode in which they may seek satisfaction of any particular want. For example, the instinct of pugnacity is weak in some, strong in others. Those in whom it is powerful may express it

either in fits of temper, in calculated efforts to browbeat their colleagues, or in fighting against difficulties and problems. Similarly the craving for self-importance, may be satisfied either by running down others or by boasting and self-advertisement or by acquiring genuine superiority and excellence in one's profession. It is obvious that some ways of gratifying the natural desires are healthy and beneficial for the community, while others are unhealthy, anti-social or evil. Sublimation means a re-direction of the desire into better and nobler channels—a focusing of the desires on objects which will not only give pleasure to the individual and utilise his energies, but will also benefit society. As a man, with advancing years, tastes more and more of the pleasures of life, he should employ progressively simpler and nobler ways to satisfy his desires.

Desires have to be managed by a judicious combination of all these methods—suppression, catharsis and sublimation. No method is by itself adequate to handle all varieties of desires. Nor can desires be completely eliminated from life, as they are the springs of emotional energy and motive power of all human activity.

Desirelessness Misunderstood

Unfortunately, in our country, this teaching of desirelessness has been widely misunderstood during the last one thousand years or so. Desire for worldly things or a higher standard of living is commonly regarded as inconsistent with spiritual progress. This misapprehension of one of the basic rules of life has led to all-round stagnation and decay, poverty and squalor. It has made us weak and unprogressive, for we neglected art, science, technology, literature, trade and industry, and other fields of wordly activity, which are all supposed to take a man away from God.

To give an example we may refer to Sri Aurobindo's criticism of the popular misconception that the collection of wealth or even a desire for it is detrimental for the spiritual aspirant. He says in The Mother: "Money is the visible sign of a universal force and is indispensable to the fullness of life. In its origin and its true action it belongs to the Divine....

"You must neither turn from an ascetic shrinking from the

money power, the means it gives and the objects it brings, nor cherish a *Rajasic* attachment to them or a spirit of enslaving self-indulgence in their gratifications. Regard wealth simply as a power to be won back for the Mother and placed at her service.

"All wealth belongs to the Divine and those who hold it are trustees, not possessors. It is with them today, tomorrow it may be elsewhere. All depends on the way they discharge their trust while it is with them, in what spirit, with what consciousness in their use of it, to what purpose.

"In your personal use of money look on all you have or get or bring as the Mother's. Make no demand but accept what you receive from her and use it for the purposes for which it is given to you. Be entirely selfless, entirely scrupulous, exact, careful in detail, a good trustee, always consider that it is her possessions and not your own that you are handling."

This technique can be applied in handling all kinds of desires Wishes, acquisitions and attainments may be either good or evil according to the purpose for which they are used. Thus not only wealth and power but even knowledge and spiritual accomplishments are known to have been employed by some people for anti-social, destructive or demoniacal purposes. The proper way to deal with them is *not to* shun them altogether but to sanctify them, to make them less *self-centred* and more other-centred, to use them as God would like them to be used

A Plan for the Control of Desires

An aspirant would be well advised to make himself a blue print for the conquest of desires. A model plan for an average person would be somewhat as follows

During the first or preparatory stage a youth will entertain desires to develop *his* body and intellect, to acquire knowledge, to build a high character, to cultivate self control, a civic sense and moral virtues. He can also cherish an ambition to become a person of eminence or distinction.

In the second stage of life he will enter some profession to make a living It will now be quite in order for him to aspire to do well in life, to rear a family, to acquire wealth and property, power and influence, even fame and greatness, or render

some outstanding service to his country or to mankind. These are all laudable objectives indispensable for the preservation and progress of humanity.

The average worker or householder is permitted many kinds of pleasures but he should not become a slave to them. He should keep his desires under check and indulge in them in moderation. Specially, so far as wealth is concerned—which purchases most of the worldly pleasures—he should observe certain precautions so that its acquisition and enjoyment will aid rather than hamper his spiritual advancement.

In the first place, wealth must be earned by means which are fair and above board. The most important item in purity is the purity of the means of livelihood. Any one who lives on ill gotten wealth pollutes his whole body, mind and soul. Some people acquire wealth by bribery or corruption, by exploiting labour, by force or fraud, and then spend a fraction of it for charitable and religious purposes. In this way they try to bribe God. But as a matter of fact they only deceive themselves. If salvation or perfection could be purchased with ill gotten wealth, there would be no place for good or honest people and God would be simply a patron of crooks, swindlers and thieves.

Secondly, even in regard to the wealth which has been acquired by the sweat of one's brow, a man should regard himself as a mere custodian and not the owner. All wealth belongs to God; it comes from Him and must be spent on his behalf and on objectives which are dear to Him. It must be shared with those who need it in some shape or form—the poor, forsaken, sick or distressed. Out of what a man has earned all that he is entitled to retain as his own wages or commission as a manager is what is sufficient for the reasonable requirements of himself and his family. Whatever is surplus to his legitimate requirements must be passed on to those not so fortunate as himself. Only then will wealth be utilised to best advantage; only then can it lead to a man's spiritual uplift. Similarly, honour, power and fame must be liberally shared with others, particularly those who help a man to acquire them. Unless he does this he stands to lose not only the good things of life but even the capacity to enjoy them.

Thirdly, it is well to recognise that the limit to which wealth may be pursued varies from man to man. It depends largely

on his requirements, what he has got and the use he makes of it. There are those engaged in trade, commerce or industry whose business it is to increase the wealth of the nation. For them the sky may well be the limit to their collection of wealth—provided they use it for the good of society. But others like teachers, poets, scientists and civil servants, though they must all live in reasonable comfort, have to be content with much smaller bank balances.

A man in the second stage of life should remember that this period of activity and enjoyment, though very important, is not the final phase nor can it last for ever. So he should prepare himself for the eventual and inevitable retirement. He should enjoy the good things of life with a spirit of detachment and renunciation. The object of all enjoyment should be to get a feeling of satiety, to weaken and still the desire for all time. In old age, wants, desires and interests should all be curtailed, simplified and elevated. Better and nobler ways of satisfying them must be adopted. They should be directed to objectives which are more and more altruistic, less and less egoistic. The personal needs must be few and easy to meet. Simultaneously there should also be an upgrading of activities. As a man grows old, he should progressively delegate more powers, responsibilities and trust to his juniors and transfer more and more of his own cares and burdens to younger shoulders. He should not engage in tasks in which others can adequately fill his place. While some pleasant and beneficial occupation is indispensable for mental and physical fitness, there is no reason why an old man should cling to his office or business till the last day of his life. After a long innings he should gradually withdraw himself not only from most of the common sense-pleasures but also from activities whose sole object is to make money or exercise authority. Instead, he should engage in voluntary work, in social service or in creative activities in order to give society the benefit of the experience he has gained during his life time. He should pass at least the evening of his life like a flower which radiates fragrance, joy and beauty but seeks nothing in return.

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The Yoga of the Dejection of Arjuna

Introductory

ALL ATTEMPTS to persuade Prince Duryodhana to return their kingdom or even five villages to the Pandavas having failed, war became inevitable. Both sides started preparations and eventually their armies stood face to face on the field of Kurukshetra. This was the scene at the beginning of the Gita.

In reply to a question from King Dhritarashtra, Sanjaya gave him an account of the battle-field. As the two armies stood in battle array ready to engage in action, Arjuna asked Sri Krishna, who was his charioteer by previous arrangement, to place their chariot between the two armies so that he might survey them well. Krishna did so. Arjuna was moved to pity when he saw that the war would involve the slaughter of his own kith and kin. His heart revolted at the idea of killing his dear ones, the revered gurus and grandsire and he eloquently described to Sri Krishna the evil effects of such a sinful course. He then threw aside his weapons in dejection and disgust.

It may be mentioned that earlier Dhritarashtra had sent

Sanjaya as an emissary to the Pandavas to dissuade them from resorting to war. Very cleverly Sanjaya had advised them then that as they were righteous persons they should not covet kingdom or possessions or commit the sin of war and that it would be far better for them to take to Sannyasa than to kill their kinsmen for the sake of a mere kingdom. These ideas planted in Arjuna's mind by Sanjaya suddenly reappeared and confused him when he saw his own friends and relations standing on both sides ready to lose their lives in battle. The arguments advanced by Arjuna in support of his reluctance to fight were more or less an echo of those which had been put into his head earlier by Sanjaya.

Arjuna was a conqueror of many foes and he would have no doubt gladly repeated the performance if those he had to kill were strangers. It is not that he had suddenly become a convert to the creed of non-violence but he was averse to killing those he loved and revered.

Sri Krishna cleared up Arjuna's doubts and reconciled the conflict of duties. These teachings, in the Gita, are addressed through Arjuna to all mankind.

'Dharmakshetre Kurukshetre'

These are the opening words of the Gita which mean: On the field of right (Dharma), the field of Kuru. Historically they refer to the plain of Kurukshetra where the Mahabharata war was fought and which was held to be of special sanctity in those days. Allegorically, the reference is to man's life which is at the same time a field of dharma and of battle. By sowing acts of goodness, heroism and creativity in the field of dharma man can raise a rich harvest of success, prosperity and happiness not only for himself but for others as well. This is the constructive or positive side of life. But life has also a negative or destructive side involving a struggle for existence. Now and then everyone is faced with situations in which he must assert his will, when he must stand up and fight against injustice, evil and tyranny outside, against his own weaknesses, against difficulties and obstacles, against misfortune, sorrow and disease, against everything that tends to pull him down or block his progress. Complete resignation or non-

resistance to evil, however laudable it may be for the rare, realised soul, is hardly a practical proposition for the average person who has to deal not exclusively with good people but largely with those who are mixtures of good and evil in varying proportions, including many who are preponderatingly wicked. Therefore even for his survival the average good person has to be bold, courageous and strong enough to receive and give hard knocks. His personality would remain cramped unless he develops the qualities of manliness, strength, valour, fortitude and fearlessness, which are classified as divine properties and are necessary not only for material but also for spiritual advancement.

Sri Aurobindo's comments in this connection are illuminating He says: "A day may come, must surely come, we may say, when humanity will be ready spiritually, morally, socially for the reign of universal peace; meanwhile the aspect of battle and the nature and function of man as a fighter have to be accepted and accounted for by any practical philosophy and religion. The Gita, taking life as it is and not only as it may be in some distant future, puts the question how this aspect and function of life, which is really an aspect and function of human activity in general, can be harmonised with the spiritual existence. The Gita is therefore addressed to a fighter, a man of action, one whose duty in life is that of war and protection...."

"Life a battle and a field of death, this is Kurukshetra; God, the terrible, this is the vision that Arjuna sees on that field of massacre....

"The command seems to have gone out from the beginning, 'Thou shall not conquer except by battle with thy fellows and thy surroundings; thou shalt not even live except by battle and struggle and by absorbing in thyself other life. The first law of this world that I have made is creation and preservation by destruction'."

Dr. Radhakrishnan's views are identical. He says: "The words, 'Dharmakshetre Kurukshetre' suggest the law of life by death. God, the terrible, is a side of the vision that Arjuna sees on the field of battle. Life is a battle, a warfare against

...ess is one of perpetual tension ...ich standing against the other.

By their mutual conflict, the development is advanced and the cosmic purpose furthered. In this world are elements of imperfection, evil and irrationality, and through action, dharma, we have to change the world and correct the elements, which are now opaque to reason, transparent to thought. War is a retributory judgment as well as an act of discipline. Kurukshetra is also called Tapahkshetra, the field of penance, of discipline. War is at once punishment and cleansing for mankind. God is judge as well as redeemer. He destroys and creates. He is Siva and Vishnu."

Brahma-vidya: Yoga-shastra

In the colophon at the end of each chapter of the Gita there is a common legend which includes the words "Brahma-vidya: Yoga-shastra". While Brahma-vidya means spiritual knowledge, Yoga-shastra means the technique of putting that knowledge into practice. Brahma-vidya corresponds to pure science, Yoga-shastra to technology. Swami Chidbhavananda explains: "Every science has its twin aspects — theory and practice. Intellectual grasp of a subject is theory; its application is practice. Many a student of Vedanta or any other system of philosophy runs the risk of being entangled in mere theorising. He may derive some intellectual pleasure in such wrangles, but life remains untouched. On the other hand Brahma-vidya is what touches and transforms life. It is intensely practical. When applied to life it is called Yoga-shastra. This is one of the appellations by which the Bhagavad Gita is known. If a wage-earner applies the principles of the Bhagavad Gita to his life, he will become a better wage-earner. A farmer will equip himself better if he only translates the Gita principles into action. A merchant is bound to thrive in his business by putting these tenets to practice. An officer will execute his duty more efficiently when he becomes a Yogi. A teacher will throw better light on his subject by his taking to the practice of Yoga. To sum up, man becomes well equipped for life by taking to Yoga. An efficient man is otherwise called a Yogi."

The same interpretation has been given by Swami Chinmayananda. He says: "In all Hindu philosophies there are two

distinct sections, one explaining the theory and the other describing the technique of practice.... The portion that explains the technique of living the philosophy and coming to a close subjective experience is called Yoga-shastra."

The Gita is an amalgam of pure knowledge and technology. While Brahma-vidya can be found in many other religious works, it is the unique distinction of the Gita that it has taught simple and easy ways of translating theory into practice, and applying vital religious truths in daily life. In the words of Dr. Radhakrishnan, "Marx's criticism that philosophers interpret the world while the real task is to change it, does not apply to the author of the Gita, who gives not only a philosophical interpretation or Brahma-vidya, but also a practical programme, Yoga-shastra. Our world is not a spectacle to contemplate; it is a field of battle. Only for the Gita improvement in the individual nature is the way to social betterment."

Sri Krishna and Arjuna

Another phrase which occurs in the colophon at the end of each chapter is Krishna-Arjuna Samvada. The Gita is indeed a dialogue between two friends—Krishna driving the war chariot and Arjuna seated in the chariot, bow and arrow in hand and ready to fight. Symbolically this figure represents the partnership between man and God and expresses the teaching of the Gita in a nutshell. Arjuna is Jivatma, the individual soul: Krishna is Paramatma, the universal soul. If man entrusts the reins of his life's chariot in the wise and loving hands of God, He will gladly act as his charioteer, as He did in the case of Arjuna. But man's comradeship with God is not merely for the purpose of his emotional or intellectual satisfaction, as some people believe. According to the Gita, man and God are partners not only in love and wisdom but also in the business of maintaining and developing the world order. It is no doubt necessary for man to accept God as his friend, philosopher and guide. But this by itself will not enable a man to reach the goal of his life. Taking the help of God, man must work out his own salvation. He must himself fight the battle of life and conquer all the foes, within

and without, that he may encounter on his life's journey. Though God is all-powerful and can accomplish anything even by a mere wish, in the world's drama He prefers to remain in the background and wants every man to play his part on the stage and play it well.

Worldly happiness no less than spiritual bliss has a place in life, and there need be no antagonism between the two. Both are blessings of God. According to the Gita both are assured to the aspirant who lives a full, vigorous and active life under the guidance and inspiration of God. For Sanjaya declared in the last verse:

> Wherever is Krishna, Yoga's Lord, wherever is Partha, the archer, assured are there prosperity, victory and happiness. So I think. XVIII/78

It will be noticed that the goal set by the Gita before mankind is not merely spiritual bliss but all round success and happiness. Further, for achieving this goal two things are necessary: namely, (1) the guidance and grace of Krishna and (2) the fighting or effort by the aspirant. If either ingredient is absent, the ideal of the Gita will not be attained.

The reader may wonder how he can get God to act as the charioteer of his life. But the problem is not so difficult as it may seem. True enough, it is not possible for everyone to get the guidance of God personally: yet it is open to all of us to get it by proxy, for example in the following ways:

(1) treading the path of righteousness, as propounded in the scriptures;

(2) drawing inspiration from the lives of prophets and saints; and

(3) by testing all our motives and actions by such questions as: How would God act if He were in my position? What does He expect me to do in the present situation? Will the course of action I have in mind meet with the approval of the Supreme Ruler of the world, who has to watch not only my interests but those of the entire creation? Answers to these questions can afford unfailing guidance in cases of doubt or perplexity.

Commenting on the partnership between Sri Krishna and

Arjuna, Sri Aurobindo explains: "The symbolic companionship of Arjuna and Krishna, the human and the divine soul, is expressed elsewhere in Indian thought, in the heavenward journey of Indra and Kutsa seated in one chariot, in the figure of two birds upon one tree in the Upanishad, in the twin figures of Nara and Narayana, the seers who do tapasya together for the knowledge. But in all these it is the idea of the divine knowledge in which, as the Gita says, all action culminates, that is in view; here it is instead the action which leads to the knowledge and in which the divine knower figures himself. Arjuna and Krishna, this human and this divine, stand together not as seers in the peaceful hermitage of meditation, but as fighter and holder of the reins in the clamorous field, in the midst of the hurtling shafts, in the chariot of battle. The Teacher of the Gita is, therefore, not only the God in man who unveils Himself in the world of knowledge, but the God in man who moves our whole world of action, by and for whom all our humanity exists and struggles and labours, towards whom all human life travels and progresses. He is the secret master of works and sacrifice and the friend of the human peoples."

Explaining the significance of the words: 'The dialogue between Krishna and Arjuna', Dr. Radhakrishnan says: "The author of the Gita gives dramatic expression to the felt presence of God in man.... Arjuna's deepest self is Krishna. Man and God need a third party as intermediary no more than do two lovers. No one is so close to God as oneself and to get at Him we require only an ardent heart, a pure intention.... There is perpetual communion between God and man...until complete harmony of purpose is reached. The Divine Principle is not at a distance but close to us. God is not a detached spectator or a distant judge of the issue, but a friend, Sakha, who is with us at all times, 'viharshayya sanbhojaneshu'." (XI/42)

In the Gita Sri Krishna has emphasised that He is not only the father, mother, teacher and ruler of all creatures but also their friend and lover. Thus he says:

> Having known Me as the Enjoyer of sacrifice and austerity, the mighty Ruler of all the worlds, and the lover of all beings, he goeth to Peace.
>
> V/29

I the father of this universe, the Mother, the supporter,... the Path, Husband, Lord,...Lover,...treasure house, seed imperishable. IX/17, 18

Seated in the heart of everyone He is ever present with us and His powerful help and guidance are ours for the taking. He would gladly work as the charioteer of our life if we would only ask Him. Arjuna was conscious of Krishna's boundless love for him and addressed Him thus:

As father with the son, as friend with friend,
With the beloved as lover, bear with me. XI/44

It is interesting to note here how Judaism has stressed the partnership of God and man. In his book *The Real Enjoyment of Living*, H. J. Schachtel writes: "To me, one of the most rewarding concepts in the teaching of Judaism is the description of man as God's partner in working out our world's salvation... We may call this cardinal teaching of Judaism the doctrine of supreme partnership. God and man, together, working as partners towards the thrilling goal of making this earth a province of the Kingdom of Heaven...Man is dignified by his status as a free agent. If he wants to, he can work with God. But he can also shun this divine partnership and invite down upon himself catastrophe and ruin."

God is the Supreme Ruler and man a humble employee or agent of the Divine Government. As such human beings are required to do their best to assist God—and one another—in promoting the welfare and progress of the world. Though God can do every thing, He wants every one to play voluntarily the part assigned to him—to be, as it were, the outward cause or instrument for executing His plans.

Therefore stand up! win for thyself renown,
Conquer thy foes, enjoy the wealth-filled realm,
By me they are already overcome,
Be thou the outward cause, left-handed one. XI/33

The more a man cooperates with God, the more of His grace and benediction does he receive.

A successful and happy life requires cooperation between man and God, a combination of work and prayer: 'Remember Me and fight. VIII/7'. As some one has put it, we are co-labourers with God in His vineyard. God has no hands but our hands to do His work today. He has willed to work through us. He has given each of us a part to play. He could, of course, remake the world in the twinkling of an eye. But His plan is such that it requires our willing cooperation. He forces nothing upon us.

Therefore, to improve the depth and quality of your life work constantly, not only for God but with God. Work as if everything depends on you and pray as if everything depends on God.

Arjuna's Vishada Yoga

These words, appearing at the end of the first discourse as its special title, mean the yoga of Arjuna's sorrow. We are quite familiar with such terms as Bhakti Yoga, Karma Yoga, Jnana Yoga, Raja Yoga and Hatha Yoga, but this new variety of yoga—the yoga of sorrow—looks altogether strange and incomprehensible.

In the Gita the word yoga and its derivatives occur very frequently. Yoga has been used in its original sense of union or to unite (with God); in an extended sense it has also been used so as to include any means or method of attaining union with God as well as any condition or circumstance that turns a man towards God. It is in this last sense that the title Arjuna's Vishada Yoga for this chapter is seen to be very appropriate and meaningful. Sorrow, suffering, disappointment, failure, defeat, feelings of want or inferiority, handicaps, limitations, discontent with one's present condition, are in human life the biggest incentives to progress, whether material or spiritual. Sorrow is not yoga or union with God, but an impetus to yoga. The sorrow of Arjuna was also yoga in this sense, because it led to the revelation of the Gita for the benefit of Arjuna and through him, of all humanity. Sorrow is a great stimulator. It can be a blessing in disguise to all of us at it was in the case of Arjuna.

2

The Yoga of Knowledge

Stand up and Fight!

IN THIS chapter, Sri Krishna's teaching actually begins All the principal lessons of the Gita are given here in germ form to be elaborated in subsequent chapters

The knowledge imparted in this chapter is useful and essential. At the outset the Gita distinguishes the real from the apparent man and for this purpose explains the different roles of the perishable body and the imperishable soul Thereafter it introduces the great concept of Buddhi Yoga and reveals the secret of action by which any one living and working in the world can draw closer to God and gradually grow into His likeness

The last eighteen verses, which detail the marks of a man of steady intellect—the ideal man of the Gita—have become famous as favourites of Gandhiji

The knowledge imparted in this discourse is of a basic character and valuable for every one It contains a clarion call to a fuller life, for it opens with an exhortation to Arjuna to stand up and fight the battle of life.

Yield not to unmanliness, O Partha; it does not befit thee. Shake off this paltry faint-heartedness and arise, O oppressor of foes. II/3

Trials and troubles, sorrow and misery are a hard fact of life. They represent crucial points in life and how a man reacts to them may make all the difference between success and failure. A man may allow them to overwhelm him and pull him down or he may treat them as a call to greater determination and effort. The Gita's teaching on this point is one of encouragement and hope to all humanity. The title of the first discourse: The Yoga of Arjuna's sorrow, indicates that sorrow is to be made into a Yoga—an occasion and an incentive for union with God. Verse II/3 conveys the same message in clear and emphatic terms. Sri Krishna wants every one to develop an attacking attitude towards the problems and handicaps of life. And this is not mere religion or philosophy but also common sense. About this verse, which is one of the greatest in the Gita, Swami Vivekananda wrote, "If one reads this one shloka, he gets all the merits of reading the entire Gita; for in this one shloka lies embedded the whole message of the Gita"

Not even for the best or holiest of men can life be altogether free from oppositions, difficulties, sorrows and disappointments. Therefore, to live successfully every one must develop an inner mechanism to surmount such shocks—an indomitable will, courage and confidence. And this is what our scriptures have enjoined. The Atma, says the Upanishad, cannot be attained by the weak. And Sri Krishna confirms this by declaring: "I am the strength of the strong, devoid of desire and passion (VII/II); I am the intelligence of the intelligent. (VII/10) I am the victory of the victorious. I am the glory of the glorious. (X/36)" Fearlessness heads the list of divine properties (XVI/1) and equanimity, one of the recurring themes of the Gita, requires that the challenges of life be met calmly and courageously. Strength, strength, said Swami Vivekananda, is the message of the Upanishads and the Gita.

Thereafter Sri Krishna mentions several strong reasons why Arjuna should fight. He says:

Further, looking to your own duty you should not waver,

because there is nothing more welcome to a Kshatriya than righteous war. II/31

Happy the Kshatriyas who obtain such a fight that comes unsought as an open door to heaven. II/32

But if you will not wage this righteous warfare, then casting away your duty and honour, you will incur sin. II/33

People will ever recount your infamy, To one highly esteemed dishonour is surely worse than death. II/34

The great car warriors will think you fled from the war from fear and you who were highly esteemed by them will be lightly held. II/35

Many unseemly words will be spoken by your enemies slandering your strength. What could be more painful than that? II/36

Slain, you will obtain heaven; victorious, you will enjoy the earth. Therefore stand up, O son of Kunti, resolved to fight II/37

Taking as equal pleasure and pain, gain and loss, victory and defeat, engage yourself in battle. Thus you will incur no sin. II/38

This exhortation to Arjuna to stand up and fight is repeated in the eleventh chapter by the Cosmic Form of the Lord:

Therefore, stand up! Win for yourself renown! Conquer your foes, enjoy the wealth-filled realm. XI/33

Giving the gist of these verses Sri Aurobindo writes: "Destroy, when by destruction the world must advance, but hate not that which thou destroyest, neither grieve for all those who perish. Do thy work with a calm, strong and equal spirit; fight and fall nobly or conquer mightily. For this is the work that God and thy nature have given to thee to accomplish".

Arjuna was a warrior by profession and the problem before him was whether to fight or not. So Sri Krishna's advice to him was given in terms of fighting. But the general import of his teaching should not be overlooked. He has called upon every one to stand up and do his duty, however hard or depressing the conditions may be. When a man performs his duty to the best of his ability, without fear or favour, unmindful of his own pleasure and profit, his spiritual progress becomes assured,

irrespective of what reward he gets immediately from the world.

Body and Soul

Every human being is composed of a body, an intellect and a soul. The soul is usually regarded as the highest constituent of a man because it is a part of the Supreme Spirit (XV/7) and shares many of its properties such as immortality. The body, too, is filled with and composed of God, but it is ever changing and mortal. The intellect is the connecting link between the body and the soul and possesses properties which are intermediate between the two. Thus the intellect and the body are both subject to change, but the intellect is superior as it does not perish when the body dies. The intellect is usually considered a part of the body, but at the time of death it attaches itself to the soul and accompanies it to its new body. (XV/8) Describing the relationship between the body and the soul. Sri Krishna says:

> There was never a time when I was not, or when you or these kings were not. Nor is it a fact that hereafter we shall all cease to be. II/12
> Just as the dweller in the body experiences in the body childhood, youth, old age, so passeth he on to another body; the steadfast one does not grieve thereat. II/13
> All these bodies pertaining to the imperishable, undefinable and eternal soul are spoken of as perishable; therefore, fight, O Arjuna. II/18

Unlearned people are not aware of the soul. This is not their fault, because it is altogether too subtle for them. They never encounter it, nor does it seem to be playing any part in their daily lives. They remain preoccupied with their bodies and naturally regard themselves as the body. To a great extent this is as it should be. The body is very familiar to the common man and requires a great deal of his attention, not only on its own account but also on account of the soul which it enshrines and serves. The soul cannot be got at directly but only through the body. Normally we cannot even be aware of the soul when

it is shorn of the body. Thus the body is the only gateway to the soul and there is none other. It is only through a proper training and use of the body—and all that it includes—that the evolution of the soul can be accomplished and its divine potentialities realised. Though the body is subject to disease, decay and death, it is not to be despised or neglected, for it is the indispensable vehicle or tenement of the soul. Moreover, as the body is filled with God, it would be wrong to regard it as evil, impure or unholy. The body which houses the soul is not the source of its bondage but the instrument of its fulfilment and freedom. It is not the cause of man's separation from God but the indispensable means of reunion with Him. The body and soul, together, produce life, and since life is a gift of God, the body no less than the soul must be regarded as a blessing of God. Not by getting rid of the body but only by working through it and making the best use of it may perfection and bliss be attained.

No one eats the skin of a mango but it is impossible to get the juice without first preserving the skin. Likewise, even though the body is the lowest constituent of a man, yet man cannot exist without his body, much less realise his destiny as a human being. The body must, therefore, be properly looked after and fed, trained and disciplined, for the service of the individual soul and the Supreme Lord.

"Lord, thou hast been very kind to me", sang Tulsidas. "For attaining perfection thou hast graciously given me a home—this human body, which is difficult even for gods to obtain".

Explaining the close relationship between the body and the soul, Dr. Jung writes:

"The body means as little to us without the psyche as the latter without the body.

"The body lays claim to equal recognition; like the psyche it also exerts a fascination. If we are still caught by the old idea of an antithesis between mind and matter, the present state of affairs means an unbearable contradiction; it may even divide us against ourselves. But if we can reconcile ourselves with the mysterious truth that spirit is the living body seen from within, and the body the outer manifestation of the living spirit—the two being really one—then we can understand why

it is that the attempt to transcend the present level of consciousness must give its due to the body. We shall also see that belief in the body cannot tolerate an outlook that denies the body in the name of the spirit".

As the body is not the real man or the whole of man, many in our country regard it as altogether useless or insignificant. This is a wrong view as would become evident if, taking it to its logical conclusion, we address ourselves only to the souls and not the bodies of others. In most of our contacts with others we deal only with their bodies and to treat those bodies with contempt or indifference would strike at the roots of all corporate life. It would be neither worldly wisdom nor piety to regard our parents and family, our friends and fellow workers as pure spirit with no physical, emotional or intellectual needs.

Many go to the other extreme. Thinking that the body is everything, they spend all their energy in attending to its needs, pleasures and embellishments; or they mortify their flesh and undertake severe austerities, fasts and vigils in the belief that the discipline of the body is synonymous with the discipline of the self. As a matter of fact, the physical body alone is not the whole man; it should neither be tortured nor pampered, but should be looked after and disciplined judiciously.

The body, though an invaluable instrument of the soul, is subject to decay and death. Therefore, the wise man preserves it and makes the best use of it while he can, but does not grieve overmuch when it is no more. He is not afraid of death which is simply a natural and inescapable phenomenon. Even when the body is dead, the soul continues its march with a change of body. And the change of body, however painful it may seem, is necessary in the interest of the individual as well as society. With an old and decrepit body the progress of the soul stops. Death of the body brings freshness and change in life. It gives the soul new tools, new friends, new environments and fresh opportunities to fulfil its mission.

The souls are essentially one, neither male or female, neither father nor son, neither husband nor wife. It is the bodies that are different and give rise to the various relationships known in life. These relationships, being dependent on the bodies, perish with the bodies. Therefore one must not be overwhelmed

with sorrow at the loss of near and dear ones. At the same time, though these relationships are temporary and in a sense unreal like the roles assigned to the members of a dramatic party, every one has to play his part as best he can. For the soul there is no school other than that of life. It is only by doing one's duty towards one another and towards society in general that man can ever hope to ascend the spiritual ladder.

From the fact that human bodies and human relationships are both ephemeral some valuable lessons emerge, for example:

(1) Do not be too much attached to your bodies, to your friends and relations, to your possessions and other good things of life.

(2) Do all the good you can and as soon as you can, for tomorrow may be too late.

(3) In particular, if you have any desire to show your regard and gratitude to your loved ones, remember that the time to do so is here and now, while they are still alive, and not after their death.

In the verses that follow Sri Krishna has exploded two popular myths about death and rebirth.

> As a man discarding worn out garments, takes others that are new, so the embodied soul, casting off worn out bodies, enters into others which are new. II/22
>
> Certain is death for the born and certain is birth for the dead. You should not, therefore, grieve over the inevitable. II/27

We are often told that both birth and death must be avoided as they are accompanied with excruciating pain. But according to verse 22 birth and death are easy and painless like the discarding of old garments and putting on of new ones. Of course there would be pain if disease or injury precedes death, but it would be felt only as long as consciousness lasts. But is there any reason why the actual process of the exit of the soul from the body (or its reverse) should not be painless? Why must we believe that the entire pain registering apparatus of the body continues to function efficiently till the very last breath of life? There is no reason to believe that the entry and exit of the soul are painful operations. But even if they are, can

we not credit the good Lord even with the intelligence and humanity of an ordinary doctor extracting a tooth? We must, therefore, accept the version of the Gita and shed all fear of both birth and death. They are natural changes and cannot hold any terror for the man who leads a dedicated life.

The careful reader will also notice that Sri Krishna's declaration in verse 27 that certain is birth for the dead runs counter to the common belief that freedom from rebirth is the goal of all human endeavours. Sri Krishna has repeatedly asserted that the entire world, all living beings and their activities are filled with God. A sojourn on earth, a fresh lease of life, cannot therefore be looked upon as a punishment or as derogatory to a man's spiritual status. To do so would amount to a condemnation of the Lord who created the world and gave us life. Therefore, a lover of God would always deem it a privilege to serve his Master in whatever capacity he may be placed. Moreover, the instincts of self-preservation and preservation of the race are very strong in all creatures, and it is contrary to reason to hold that the goal of all life is the extinction of life. The problem of rebirth is, therefore, best left in the hands of the wise and merciful God. And this is also the view of many saints. For example, Tulsidas says: "This is my prayer to thee, O Lord. In whatever form I may be born as a result of my past actions, mayst thy love and grace never forsake me, even as a tortoise never forsakes its eggs."

Buddhi Yoga

The latter half of this chapter, beginning with verse 39, is devoted to an exposition of the supremacy of Buddhi (intellect), some of its important implications and the marks of a person of steady intellect. Here Sri Krishna has introduced a new term, which according to some authorities is 'Buddhi Yoga' and according to others 'Yoga Buddhi'. These expressions have been variously translated as Jnana Yoga or the way of knowledge, yoga of even-mindedness, wisdom of the yoga and point of view of yoga or karma yoga. I have preferred the term Buddhi Yoga, as it occurs in other chapters also and is more in consonance with the general teaching of the Gita. It means, to my mind, the yoga of intelligence, that is union of the

intellect with God or union with God through the intellect. The chief requirements of Buddhi Yoga are that the Buddhi is trained, developed and dedicated to God and the intellect thus enlightened is used (*a*) as an instrument of thought—for creating and sifting ideas, (*b*) for illumining actions and (*c*) for controlling emotions. When Buddhi Yoga is applied to works, they become Karma Yoga or skilful actions. Thus the most common form of Buddhi Yoga in every day life is Karma Yoga, but the term Buddhi Yoga is more comprehensive and includes the discipline of the emotions, the intelligence and the senses as well.

One merit of this interpretation of the term Buddhi Yoga is that it is not far-fetched or too technical but is based on the simple, straightforward and commonly accepted meaning of the word Buddhi. In putting it forward I have drawn inspiration from several well known thinkers, including Sri Aurobindo, who writes: "It is because he acts ignorantly, with a wrong intelligence and therefore with a wrong will in these matters, that man is or seems to be bound by his works, otherwise works are not bondage to the free soul. It is because of this wrong intelligence that he has hope and fear, wrath and grief and transient joy, otherwise works are possible with a perfect serenity and freedom. Therefore, it is the Yoga of the Buddhi, the intelligence, that is first enjoined on Arjuna. To act with right intelligence and therefore with a right will, fixed in the One, aware of the one Self in all and acting out of its equal serenity, not running about in different directions under the thousand impulses of our superficial mental self, is the Yoga of the intelligent will".

Indian philosophy makes a distinction between Buddhi and Mana. Buddhi is translated as intellect, intelligence, reason or understanding, mana as mind, Buddhi and mana are not separate entities but higher and lower parts of the same brain. If you watch the actions of a child you will see how the mind works. The function of the intellect is to think, reason, decide, will, compare and contrast, imagine, create ideas and store up knowledge. The mind is the connecting link between the intellect and the senses; some call it an inner or sixth sense. It is mostly a slave of external stimuli and is liable to be carried away by any passing whim or fancy. It receives impressions

from the organs of perception and transmits orders to the organs of action. But all this is done instinctively, automatically and without thought. The eyes cannot see, nor the ears hear, if the mind is absent. The mind is more of instinct than of brain. The nature of mind is to follow the senses more or less spontaneously and to linger on objects that it likes, hates or fears. The mind and the intelligence act and react on each other, but of the two, the intelligence is by far the superior. The mind is a subordinate of the intellect and should function as such, but if the intelligence is weak or unwatchful, the mind gets out of control and drags the intellect along.

We have a yoga of physical culture (Hatha Yoga), one of mind control (Raja Yoga) and another of the emotions (Bhakti Yoga). In the same way it is even more necessary to have a yoga of the intellect, since the intellect is superior to the body, the mind as well as the emotions and is, in fact, their coordinator and controller. Sri Krishna has filled this gap. In propounding his yoga of Buddhi he has broken new ground and made a most valuable contribution to the religious thought of the world. For Buddhi Yoga is the perfect integration of religion and science, reason and faith, piety and common sense. Truths of religion and philosophy must accord with the facts of life as well as the findings of science.

It is commonly believed that Buddhi has no use in the quest of God. But according to Sri Krishna an enlightened and refined intelligence is as necessary for spiritual evolution as for worldly success. Even the simplest of religious principles can be misunderstood and misapplied without the help of a trained intellect. Unfortunately, this is just what has been happening in Hindu society, which, inspite of its glorious heritage of the Vedanta and the Gita, continues to be ridden by superstition, ritualism, orthodoxy, untouchability, caste and conservatism.

The value of intelligence in worldly work is well recognised. General and technical education, lectures and books, study and discussion are all well known aids to the development of the intellect. But it was left to Sri Krishna to introduce intelligence into the spiritual field and to accord Buddhi Yoga the pride of place among all the various systems of Yoga. The Buddhi is the greatest of all the associates of the soul. The Yoga of

Buddhi is, therefore, superior to the other varieties of Yoga in the same measure as the intellect is superior to the mind, the emotions and the body.

According to the Upanishads the body is the chariot in which the soul is seated, while the Buddhi is the charioteer, the mind is the reins and the senses, the horses. If this chariot is to reach its destination in safety and comfort, the charioteer, Buddhi, must be skilful and alert, must know its way through the world and must have the horses well under control. For this purpose the intellect must be properly trained and developed. Elsewhere in the Upanishads man is enjoined to acquire knowledge both of God and of the world. But neither kind of knowledge can be gained without a well developed intelligence.

Sri Krishna has repeatedly emphasised the role of intelligence in the conduct of life. For example, he says:

> Therefore take refuge in Buddhi O Arjuna. II/49
> The senses are said to be greater than the body; but greater than the senses is the mind. Greater than the mind is the intellect; and what is greater than the intellect is he (the soul). III/42
> I am the intelligence of the intelligent. VII/II
> In living beings I am the intelligence. X/22
> Among feminine qualities I am memory and intelligence. X/34
> Memory, wisdom and the reasoning faculty also emanate from Me. XV/15

In chapter XVIII he again reverts to this topic and classifies both intelligence and knowledge into three grades. Finally, just before concluding his teaching he again calls upon Arjuna to resort to Buddhi Yoga:

> Mentally dedicating all deeds to Me, having Me as the highest goal, resorting to Buddhi Yoga, do you ever fix your mind on Me. XVIII/57

Great as are the mind and the body, it would be wrong to regard them as the whole or even as the most important part

of man's personality. The intellect is the major working partner of the soul and any scheme of spiritual discipline to be satisfactory must include proper training and development of the intellect, whereby it (1) becomes an efficient guide for the management of life, (2) is ever united to the soul and works as its faithful assistant and (3) keeps the mind, the senses and the body under control and makes good use of them. Neglect of the intellect has been a major cause of the backwardness of Hindu society.

The word Buddhi and its synonyms have been used in the Gita a number of times. Sri Krishna attaches the highest importance to the cultivation of the intellect. He has made it quite clear that in so far as the mind is distinct from the intelligence, the mere control of the mind is not sufficient; one must also train, refine and spiritualise the intellect. The reader may refer to VI/25, VIII/7, XII/8, 14 and XVIII/49.

Many religious teachers in India are happy if the mind can be brought under discipline and lay all their emphasis on it. Not so Sri Krishna. He insists that self-discipline is not complete until the understanding also has been trained, developed and fixed in God. The cultivation of both the intellect and the mind must proceed simultaneously, but if a choice has to be made between the two, the intellect must receive priority.

Sri Krishna opens the topic of Buddhi Yoga with the following words:

> Sankhya (self-knowledge) has been presented to you. Hearken now to the Yoga of Buddhi. Endued with this Yoga you will cast away the bonds of Karma. II/39

Buddhi Yoga not only frees a man from the bonds of action but also leads to God realisation:

> To them, ever united with Me and worshipping Me with love, I give the Yoga of Buddhi, by which they come to Me. X/10

When a man's Buddhi is destroyed he goes to ruin (II/63). Conversely, when God is pleased with some one He gives him

Buddhi Yoga, or an enlightened intellect which helps him reach God. A well developed and obedient intellect is beneficial in many ways. It is a man's best assistant. It can save him from dangers and temptations. It enables him to make the best use of his resources. Work, when mixed with brains becomes the Yoga of work—a way to perfection. Above all, with the help of the Buddhi a man acquires knowledge of the world, man and God. This knowledge, in turn, enables him to live his life wisely and steer clear of sins (IV/36); it burns up the evil effects of actions (IV/37) and is unequalled as a purifier (IV/38). This knowledge, which possesses such wonderful properties, is not a magic formula which can be breathed by a teacher into the ears of a disciple. It is obviously to be acquired the hard way —by painstaking study, observation and reflection, trial and error, and consolidated by constant application in daily life. It is not to remain confined to his intellect or speech but must permeate all his actions (IV/38), habits and character (XIII/7-11).

Buddhi Yoga is an all round and comprehensive Yoga. It is not built round any particular prophet, or based on special rituals or complicated sadhanas. It is a universal religion requiring the proper development and use of the intellect and other faculties for the good of all. In Buddhi Yoga no effort is wasted, even if it is incomplete or contains procedural defects. Its benefits are cumulative and progressive, every effort counts as a merit and is added up on the credit side. Sri Krishna says:

> In this (Buddhi Yoga) no effort is ever lost and no obstacle prevails. Even a little of this righteousness (dharma) saves one from great danger. *II/40*

A. S. P. Ayyar, in his *Gita for the Layman,* has mentioned a very instructive interpretation of the words "no effort is ever lost". *Calling it the theory of Least Action, he says:* "As Gitananda has remarked so aptly, the Gita enunciates the theory of least action. The thousand meaningless acts of life, conducive to selfish aggrandisement or glory or gain (even gain of heaven) may and should be abandoned. But the core of it all, action for Lokasangraha, including of course, action

for Sareeryatra, ought never to be abandoned. Every man should follow God's example, and be constantly engaged in action for Lokasangraha, without the least hankering after results, and dedicating all his acts to God as a sacrifice. It is for God to see to the fruits. This will mean that no effort is wasted. This is true skill in action."

Buddhi Applied to Ideas

We now come to some of the practical applications of Buddhi Yoga in daily life. It requires, in the first place, that all ideas, regardless of their author, be thoroughly sifted and examined in the light of reason and experience, before being accepted or put into practice. A follower of the path of Buddhi discriminates between the seeming good and the real good, immediate gain and lasting gain, essentials and non-essentials, the shell and the kernal of religion. He possesses the power of decision and the ability to choose one out of a number of alternatives open to him. (II/41) He follows the spirit of religious teachings and not their letter, knowing full well that dogma and ritualism are not the essence of spiritual life. He keeps his intellect clear of selfful desires, anger and other strong emotions, which, it is well known, cloud the intellect and vitiate its efficiency (II/42, 43, 44). The scriptures, useful as they are, are no substitute for a man's own intelligence and common sense. (II/46). Some of these verses are given below:

> Arjuna, in this blessed path, the intellect is determinate and one pointed, whereas the intellect of the indecisive is scattered in many directions and endless. II/41
>
> Flowery speech is uttered by the foolish, rejoicing in the letter of the Vedas, O Partha, saying "There is naught but this". II/42
>
> Who are desire ridden, who hold the attainment of heaven as the goal of life and its activities, who engage in various rites for the sake of pleasure and lordship. II/43
>
> Who cling to pleasure and power, attain neither fixity of intellect nor discrimination. II/44
>
> All the Vedas are as useful to an enlightened Brahman as is a tank in a place covered all over with water. II/46

When your Buddhi has escaped from this tangle of delusion, then shall you gain indifference to things heard and yet to be heard. II/52

When your intellect, (now) bewildered by the conflict of opinions, becomes poised and firmly fixed in one-pointed ness, then shall you get into Yoga (union with the Divine) II/53

Emphasising the importance of thinking for oneself, the Yoga Vasistha echoes the teaching of the Gita in the following way:

"God Vishnu, however long propitiated and however pleased, cannot bestow self-knowledge on one who does not think for himself.

"Reasonable words even of a child ought to be accepted and those even of the Creator (Brahma) are to be discarded like straw if they are otherwise."

When a man acquires a clear understanding, he does not follow others blindly but judges things for himself to determine what is best for him. (II/52) He is no longer baffled by any conflicting or obscure injunctions of the scriptures but going to the root of the matter, makes his own choice and sticks to it. Only when his intellect has become steady can he be firmly established in God. (II/53) Verse 52 obviously refers to teachers of religion and saintly persons.

Some of these verses—specially verse 46—seem to belittle the Vedas, but as a matter of fact they only bring out the true position of scriptures and gurus, in the conduct of life, in relation to a man's own intelligence. The Vedas are worthy of the highest reverence, being the oldest and greatest scriptures of the world and the primary source of the Gita itself. Teachers and books are extremely useful, nay indispensable, for stimulating and enlightening the intellect, but there they stop, leaving the individual to manage the affairs of his life with the help of his own intelligence. It is no reflection on the Vedas and the gurus to say that they cannot take the place of a man's intellect. In fact they are not meant to supersede a man's intelligence but only to train and develop it. They cannot

cover all the contingencies or give a man minute to minute guidance which only his trained intellect can do. Even to understand the Vedas a high level of intelligence is required. Moreover, who is to judge which particular verse of a holy book is applicable to a particular individual in particular circumstances? And who is to decide—except one's own intelligence—when the verses of the Vedas or their interpretations by different authorities seem to be in conflict with one another? It is intelligence which distinguishes man from animals. At every step in life one encounters challenges which cannot be met without the help of a trained intellect. In the present day world no individual or nation that neglects the development of the intellect has a chance of survival. With his intellect enlightened by education and by gurus and scriptures, the disciple of Sri Krishna is free to act as he thinks best. By extolling the intellect Sri Krishna has condemned the habit of abdicating one's reason to others and sticking to old customs or traditions blindly and mechanically. And he has not asked for any special treatment or consideration for his own teaching. For at the end of the concluding discourse he says:

> Thus has knowledge more secret than secrecy itself been imparted to you by Me. Having reflected on it fully, do as you like. XVIII/63

And the reader will no doubt apply the same technique to the views of the present writer.

In this connection it is useful to recall the teachings of Swami Rama Tirtha. In his book *The Heart of Rama* he wrote: "Accept not a religion because it is the oldest; it being the oldest is no proof of its being the true one. Sometimes the oldest houses ought to be pulled down and the oldest clothes must be changed.... Accept not a religion because it comes from a great ascetic, from a man who has renounced every thing.... Accept not a religion because it comes from a person whose character was the highest; often times people of the grandest character have failed in expounding the truth.... Accept a thing and believe in a religion on its own merits. Examine it yourself. Sift it."

Buddhi Applied to Action

Another great use of an enlightened intellect is to make work skilful and efficient. When the Buddhi, trained, developed and united to God, is applied to actions, Karma becomes Karma Yoga. How this is accomplished is now explained, beginning with verse 47, which contains the quintessence of Karma Yoga:

> To work alone you have a right, but never to its fruits. So let not the fruit of actions be your motive nor should you be attached to inaction. II/47

Briefly speaking, this verse means; Duties before rights. Cling to the duty, give up the right and work tirelessly, efficiently and selflessly. Work for the good of society and to set an example to others. In the welfare of all see your own welfare.

To most of us work is a drudgery, at best a burdensome duty. But Sri Krishna has called it a right, because rights are hidden in duties. Duties are the seeds of rights. Looked at in this way, work is man's greatest privilege. By his labours he can carve out his own destiny; he can gain knowledge, wealth, position, power, honour, even peace and perfection. Work is the one supreme right by which one can earn all other rights. It is the way to health and happiness, both mental and physical.

Work is the master key to happiness. He who works for work's sake, who makes work his recreation and delight, links himself up with an unfailing source of joy. Take care of your duties, says Sri Krishna, and your rights will take care of themselves. If every one does his best and cares more for his duties and responsibilities and less for his rights, the Kingdom of God would be reestablished on this planet in no time.

The second part of verse 47 affirms that man has no right to the fruits of his labours. This is the fundamental tenet of Karma Yoga. It may be explained in several different ways.

Its one obvious meaning is that the fruits of a man's labour are not under his power or control, but also depend on a number of outside factors. Inspite of his best efforts man cannot command the desired results at will.

Secondly, this dictum means that man has no absolute or exclusive right to the fruits of his labours. Whatever he accomplishes is the result of the combined efforts of many brains and hands, both past and present; truly speaking, they are all co-authors of the work and entitled to share in the reward. Under this category would come all the people who brought him up, who taught him in school or college, the writers of the books he read, those who look after his creature comforts, those who help or encourage him in his work and many others. This is the basis of the divine socialism (Yajna and Karma Phala Tyaga) taught by Sri Krishna.

A man presses a switch and darkness flees from his apartment. No doubt it is he who has lighted the room. But can he take the entire credit for it? What is the contribution of the countless persons who worked to produce and transport the energy, to make and lay the wires, the switch and the bulb? And going back further, how much does the glowing of that lamp owe to those eminent scientists who discovered electricity and its many practical applications? This simple illustration will show that the person who is generally considered the accomplisher of a task is never its sole author. Man's work requires the help and cooperation of a large number of people, specified as well as unspecified. Therefore, the fruits of his labours belong not to himself alone but to society.

The man in search of God has yet another reason for not claiming the fruits of his own actions. Steeped in God as he is, to him the world is the Kingdom of God, all the work of the world is God's own work, whatever good things he gets by his efforts are received by him for and on behalf of his Master and really belong to Him, and he, as an employee of God's government, is entitled to retain and appropriate only his own wages and not everything that passes through his hands. Renunciation of the fruits of one's labour in the service of the Lord is one of the greatest teachings of the Gita. It is the best way of ennobling and spiritualising the common tasks of life. Eminent scientists, thinkers and philosophers cannot think of a better way than to do the work selflessly.

In the vital aspects of life it is common knowledge that when a man takes food, rest and exercise and observes the ordinary

laws of health, God or Nature does all the rest; then his heart beat, breathing, digestion, production and storage of energy all continue automatically without any conscious effort or wish on his part. The obvious conclusion is that if a man plays his part properly, God will not fail to play His. And this may well apply to all the phases of life. Therefore, if a man performs his duties to the best of his ability, he may depend on it that the unseen powers of nature will step in and cater to his needs, material as well as spiritual.

Automatically and inevitably a man reaps as he sows. No power can permanently deprive him of his dues. But when he asserts his rights, when he becomes absorbed in thoughts of personal gain, not only does his soul get caught up in worldliness, but his efficiency also suffers, because he works with a mind which is divided between the actual performance of the work and anxiety for the results he is producing and the impression he is making on the gallery. If he is not preoccupied with personal interests, he can apply his whole heart and mind to the task in hand and thereby improve his performance and output. In other words, by following Sri Krishna's teaching a man actually increases his profits. Sometimes it may seem as if he is being cheated of his dues, but in the long run the results are better than if he had worked with an eye always on his own good. This is not surprising. Because who would bother to learn any art or craft unless it led to increased benefits? Who would follow or study the art of life taught in the Gita except with the hope of getting a better yield from his labours? As a matter of fact, the unselfishness taught by Sri Krishna is the greatest selfishness, to borrow an expression from Bernard Shaw.

The man of God concerns himself primarily with his duties and responsibilities. He does his best at all times and in all circumstances. But he leaves himself in the gracious hands of God instead of trying to carry himself upon his own shoulders. The main object of his labours is the pleasure of the Lord and the good of His creatures; his own happiness is the inevitable by-product of his activities and he gets it in abundance too.

The theme of Karma Yoga is developed in the next four verses which read as follows:

Arjuna, perform your duties dwelling in union with the Divine, relinquishing attachment and remaining even-minded in success and failure; even-mindedness is called Yoga.
II/48

Action is far inferior to Buddhi Yoga. Therefore take refuge in Buddhi, O Arjuna. Poor and wretched are they who crave for fruit. II/49

Pursuing the Yoga of Buddhi, one sheds in this life both good and evil. Therefore devote yourself to Yoga. Verily, Yoga is work done to perfection. II/50

Those who practise the Yoga of Buddhi and renounce the fruits of actions are freed from the bondage of life and attain the blissful supreme state. II/51

In verse 49 Sri Krishna emphasises that work (without an infusion of Buddhi) is far inferior to work done with the aid of an enlightened Buddhi (Buddhi Yoga). Therefore, the Lord calls upon Arjuna to take refuge in Buddhi and use his refined intelligence in all the works of life. This interpretation is quite straightforward. But some commentators have translated the word Buddhi occurring in verse 49 as equanimity or knowledge.

The principal requirements of (Karma) Yoga as given in the foregoing verses are:

(1) Perfection or skill in work (II/50);

(2) Equanimity (II/48); and

(3) Renunciation of the fruits of actions (II/49, 51). These will be discussed now.

Work Efficiently

In verse 50 Yoga has been defined as skill in action, that is work done efficiently. If the term Buddhi Yoga and the exhortation to take refuge in Buddhi mean anything, they mean that brain must be applied in all work to make the performance skilful. The skill which can transform any action into Yoga is of two kinds—worldly and spiritual. However satisfactory a piece of work may be from the purely spiritual point of view, it cannot be called Yoga if it is done in a careless, dilatory or inept manner. One of the qualities which endear a devotee to the Lord is dexterity in work (XII/16).

A few words may be added here to explain what efficiency means in the worldly sense. It requires, in the first place, that the performance be accurate and free from mistakes. The product must be of a high quality, whether the work is meditation, cooking, typing or fighting. Secondly, the work must be done on time and the rate of working must be fast but without sacrificing quality or accuracy. Speed and accuracy may appear mutually exclusive and this is no doubt true in the lower stages of efficiency. But with determined effort the novice can improve both accuracy and speed at the same time. A truly efficient worker is a fast worker. Habitual slowness in work is a sure sign of incompetence.

The third important requirement of efficiency is that the work should be done with the minimum expenditure of labour, energy, materials and money. An efficient worker is studiously and purposively economical. He carries his burdens lightly because he follows the best techniques of efficient working. He avoids worry and friction and can work for long periods without feeling tired.

The fourth and highest component of efficiency is originality. It is specially important in all higher types of work and is usually the last to be acquired, if ever. A capable worker will not merely carry on the routine; he will not be content with just doing the work as in the past but would endeavour to grow two flowers where one grew before. He would concentrate on improvements, on the creation of new ideas, new values and new products. He will think out ways by which the work may be done better, faster and more economically. The search for originality is the root of all invention and discovery, of all advancement and progress. There is no sphere of work in which touches of originality cannot be introduced. A cook can make new dishes. New techniques, new medicines and new machines can be invented. Management of institutions and governments can be improved and even revolutionised. The greatest benefactors of humanity have been those who blazed new trails or dreamt of new things and made their dreams come true for a fuller treatment of efficiency the reader may see *The Art of Working* by the author.

Naturally Sri Krishna has not gone into these details. But he has brought out clearly in this and subsequent chapters

the various steps by which work may be made skilful in the spiritual sense. These spiritual requirements of skill in work are:

(1) even-mindedness;
(2) renunciation of the fruit of actions;
(3) renunciation of selfful desires;
(4) freedom from attachment; and
(5) freedom from egoism.

The first three are discussed in this chapter; the remaining two in the next chapter.

Even-Mindedness

Equanimity or equality is another very great lesson of the Gita. As already mentioned, it is one of the definitions of Yoga (II/48). He who has established himself in equality is fitted for immortality (II/15); he is not bound by the results of his actions (IV/22) and he becomes established in God (V/19, VI/31). Sri Krishna says:

> The man whom these (contacts with matter) torment not, O chief of men, who is evenminded in pain and pleasure, steadfast, he is fitted for immortality. II/15
> Taking as equal pleasure and pain, gain and loss, victory and defeat, engage in battle; thus thou shalt not incur sin. II/38

The importance of equi-mindedness has been repeatedly emphasised in the Gita and the reader may see the following verses: IV/22; V/18, 19: VI/7-9, 29-32; XII/13, 18, 19; XIII/28; XIV/24, 25; and XVIII/26, 54.

Even-mindedness is a key to success and happiness in life. It is an attitude of mind that finds light and hope in all circumstances. As an essential part of Karma Yoga, it can be practised, tested and perfected only in the battle of life and not in the solitude of a Himalayan cave.

An even-minded person does not deaden his senses or organs of perception. He is not so thick-skinned as to be insensitive to all feelings of pleasure and pain, honour and dishonour, success and failure, poverty and prosperity. On the

contrary, he is a highly developed person who knows better than many others the difference between these various pairs of opposites; and his constant endeavour is to promote the welfare of all-including himself. But he is not over-elated by success or demoralised by failure. He does not get intoxicated by power or fame. Success and failure, pleasure and pain are all milestones on the road to perfection. He takes them all in his stride and does not allow them to interfere with his progress.

Equanimity requires preparedness. Sri Krishna's disciple is an efficient person who is never broken or beaten by emergencies or set-backs. He provides against them in advance and if still they come, he does not lose his nerve but faces them coolly and bravely. The mind attains its peak efficiency only when calm.

An even-minded person is calm and level headed. He keeps his head under provocation. He avoids fear and worry as enemies of the intellect. And talking of worry, the reader would do well to read Dale Carnegie's famous book: 'How to stop Worrying and Start Living'. An admirable commentary on Sri Krishna's teaching of even-mindedness, it is as delightful as instructive.

Equimindedness requires perseverance and patience in the face of failure and defeat, indomitable courage and fortitutde to pursue the goal inspite of danger and difficulty. It also requires fairness and impartiality to all: (VI/9) the same standard of judging the pleasure and pain of others, whether they are friends or foes or strangers (VI/32). Impartiality is a very great virtue, specially in those who are placed in positions of authority over others—whether in the home, office or factory.

Strong desires, aversions and attachments are all liable to disturb the peace of mind. Any one in search of equanimity will, therefore, keep them well under control.

It will be useful to compare the views of western thinkers on this subject. "This is the wisdom for the successful life," writes H. J. Schachtel, a Jewish divine in his book *The Real Enjoyment of Living*, "to work hard but not to expect too much; to love but not to deem it inviolable; to dream but not to rage at the rude awakening; to believe in God but not to rebel and blaspheme; ... to be gazing upward, even upward

with such eager intensity that the light of our own eyes lends colour and radiance to the world around us, so that we can go forward undaunted and faithful, unafraid and confident, meeting successfully whatever betide. If it be skies of sunshine, to enjoy them deeply, knowing how unusually blessed we are. And if it be skies of clouds, to find even in the clouds the rainbow of promise".

A man of equanimity has a joyful spirit which overrides the jolts, irritations and afflictions of life. His sources of happiness are his own optimism, his good actions and his close association with God, the fountain-head of all joy, wisdom and love. And this brings us to the other and higher sense in which the term equality has been used in the Gita—seeing God in all creatures, in all activities, in all situations and events. The supreme test and the very essence of equimindedness is to realise that God is everything and everywhere. This is the highest goal placed by Sri Krishna before mankind. To see God everywhere is to worship Him abiding in all creatures. And "he who does this", says Sri Krishna, "lives in Me, whatever his mode of living". (VI/31) This lesson has been stressed repeatedly, for example in verses V/18, 19; VI/29, 30, 32 and XIII/28.

It should, however, be remembered that what the Gita has taught is equal vision and not equal behaviour. The advice to regard equally friends, strangers and foes, the righteous as well as the unrighteous (VI/9) has to be interpreted intelligently. It does not mean that they are to be treated alike. Mother and daughter, superior and subordinate, drinking, water and drain water have of course to be dealt with differently. Slackers must be taken to task; evil-doers have to be punished and the enemies of the country have to be fought and vanquished. But the lover of God will see the same Lord in all, will be kind and considerate to all and serve every one according to his needs.

Sometimes God comes to you with gifts of love and help and kindness. At other times he comes to receive similar gifts from you out of what he himself has given you. Sometimes he comes in the form of evil doers to receive their suitable punishment for the good of society. And sometimes the same Lord comes in other ugly forms to test your courage, re-

sourcefulness, strength and fighting qualities, which are all manifestations of Divine Power (VII/10, 11)

Explaining this point Sri Aurobindo writes: "Equality too there will be with regard to the action of others upon us. Nothing that they can do will alter the inner oneness, love, sympathy which arise from the perception of the one Self in all, the Divine in all beings. But a resigned forbearance and submission to them and their deeds, a passive non-resistance, will be no necessary part of the action.... Therefore Arjuna is bidden to resist, to fight without hatred or personal desire or personal enmity or antagonism, since to the liberated soul these feelings are impossible".

Two qualifications to the rule of equimindedness are noteworthy. The Gita, while mentioning many pairs of opposites has left out good and evil, right and wrong. And very wisely too. For discrimination between right and wrong is the very essence of spiritual life. Far from encouraging or permitting an attitude of neutrality to good and evil, Sri Krishna has declared (IV/8) that he himself comes down on earth as an Avatar for the protection of the good and the destruction of evil; and he naturally expects every one to throw the entire weight of his life on the side of the good, the right and the just.

Secondly, the rule of even-mindedness is only applicable to one's own pleasure and pain and not of others. There can be no hope for an aspirant who looks equally at the joys and sorrows of humanity, who is not moved to acts of sympathy and kindness by the sufferings of his neighbours and who does not take delight in making and seeing others happy.

Renounce the Fruit of Action

Another valuable and revolutionary teaching of the Gita is to renounce the fruit of action. It is the magic formula that transforms Karma into Karma Yoga, work into worship. It is a very simple technique which can be practised by any one; and yet it has the power of divinising the personality of man and making his entire life a Yajna or sacrifice, a perpetual yoga or constant adoration of God. Sri Krishna has asserted that he who does not seek the fruit of his labours is a

Sannyasi as well as a Yogi; by renouncing the fruits of his actions he becomes truly established in union with the Divine:

> He who does the work which he ought to do and does not seek its fruit, he is a sannyasi, he is a yogi—and not he who does no work and maintains no sacred fires. VI/1

To crown all Sri Krishna has said that the *renunciation of the* fruit of actions is the best of sadhanas, which immediately brings peace:

> Better indeed is knowledge than constant practice, than knowledge meditation is better; than meditation renunciation of the fruit of action; on renunciation follows peace. XII/12

The Gita has *more than twenty* verses (distributed in seven chapters) wherein this lesson has been taught. (II/47, 49, 51; IV/14, 20; VI/1, XII/12, XVII/11, 12, 17, 21; XVIII/2, 4, 6, 9, 11, 12, 23, 27) The relevant instructions in the present chapter are:

> You have no right to the fruit of your actions; so let not the fruit of action be your motive. II/47
> Pitiable are they who work for fruit. II/49
> The sages united to Buddhi *renounce* the fruit which action yields, and liberated from the burdens of life, they go to the blissful seat. II/51

Many commentators have explained the renunciation of the fruit of *action* as the renunciation of the desire for, or attachment to, the fruit of action. But as Satavalekar and some others have pointed out, the word tyaga in Sanskrit has two meanings: one to renounce and the other to donate or give away in charity. Renunciation of the fruit of actions, therefore, means the giving away (dana) of what one has earned or acquired to those who are needy, to institutions or to society in general. As a result of one's labours one may get knowledge, wealth, power and prestige; all these are to be used for

the benefit of others and shared with those less fortunate than oneself. Whether a man works selfishly or unselfishly he must receive his due remuneration and when he shares it liberally with others, he progressively loses his ego in God. A few enlightened ones there may be who work from unselfish motives. But for the vast majority of people, who work only for personal gain, the best way to cultivate unselfishness is by acts of kindness, charity and service rather than by merely wishing or intending to be unselfish.

The reader may wonder how such a simple device as the giving away of the fruits of one's actions can spiritualise the whole character and life of a man. Is it not much too good to be true, too easy to be effective? Is it not an over-simplification of the whole scheme of rigorous self-discipline, since according to the common belief spiritual progress is not possible without a long course of japa, meditation, tapasya or yogic exercises?

In the writings of William James, the eminent psychologist, there is a famous and oft quoted passage which explains the efficacy of external action in training the mind and the emotions. He says: "Action seems to follow feeling, but action and feeling go together; and by regulating the action, which is under the more direct control of the will, we can indirectly regulate the feeling which is not. Thus the sovereign voluntary path to cheerfulness, if your cheerfulness be lost, is to sit up cheerfully and act and speak as if cheerfulness were already there".

It is well known that a man's thoughts have a profound influence upon his life. As some one put it, "Sow a thought and you reap an act. Sow an act and you reap a habit. Sow a habit and you reap a character. Sow a character and you reap a destiny". As a man thinketh, so is he. But as pointed out by William James, the converse is also true: as a man acts and speaks, so he becomes. Every act of giving is holy. By reflex action it gradually divinises the giver's heart and intellect and entire personality. This is the basis of Karma Yoga in general and of the renunciation of the fruit of actions in particular.

A little reflection will show that when a man adopts the giving away of the fruits of his actions as the motto of his life, he becomes less and less ego-centred and more and more other-

centred. He develops in himself such qualities as kindness, compassion, simple living, self control and non-attachment. The motive for avarice, bribery, profiteering, black marketing and similar other vices automatically disappears. Progressively he becomes purer in thought, word and deed. Ever engaged in his duties, his whole life is lived for the Lord. By constant giving he ultimately gives his own petty self away and becomes a likeness of God. It is for this reason that Sri Krishna rates the renunciation of the fruit of one's labours as the best of sadhanas for the common folk. ((See also chapter XII)

A Person of Stable Intellect

In an earlier section the role of the intellect as the guiding light of life was stressed and it was explained how the Buddhi and works mutually illumine each other and how everyday work is one of the best means of developing and refining the intellect. The rest of this chapter, detailing the marks of a man of stable intelligence, deals largely with the discipline of the mind, the emotions and the senses. Without this discipline they can easily mislead or overthrow the intellect, their master.

It is a special greatness of the Gita that again and again it puts forward a picture of the perfect man so that the aspirant is constantly reminded of what to strive for and how to measure his own progress from time to time. The first of such pictures, namely that of a man of stable intellect, is presented here at the very beginning of Sri Krishna's teaching. The reader will notice that the Gita does not define the ideal man as a Hindu or one who accepts Sri Krishna as the only Lord and Saviour, but as one who assiduously cultivates certain specified qualities. The chief of these qualities which the aspirant must build into his character are:

(1) control over desires (II/55, 70, 71);
(2) union with God (II/55);
(3) equanimity (II/56);
(4) non-attachment (II/57, 71);
(5) control over senses and mind (II/58-68);
(6) a tranquil mind and joyous spirit (II/64-66); and
(7) freedom from egoism (II/71).

Taken literally, verse 55 seems to require the abandonment

of all desires. But in reality Sri Krishna has called for the abandonment of only self-ful desires, for in verse VII/II he has clearly identified himself with desires not contrary to Dharma.

> When a man abandons, O Partha, all the desires of the heart and is satisfied in the Self by the self, then is he called stable in intellect. II/55

According to Madhavacharya, the phrase 'all desires' in this verse means all prohibited desires. Radhakrishnan has used the words 'selfish desires' in his comments. He says, "Negatively the state is one of freedom from selfish desires and positively it is one of concentration on the Supreme".

The perfect man of the Gita has no personal desires of his own, being established in a state of supreme bliss through his communion with God.

He uses his firm intelligence to control his emotions. He does not allow anxiety, fear, anger, passion, grief or excessive joy to get the better of him or run away with his discrimination. He cultivates equanimity.

> He whose mind is free from anxiety amid pains, indifferent among pleasures, loosed from passion, fear and anger, is called a sage of stable mind. II/56

The feeling of 'I' and 'mine' lies at the root of fear, anxiety, grief etc. It is well known that no one is upset by grief at a loss incurred by another. In order to acquire equanimity the aspirant is, therefore, required to cultivate detachment:

> He who on every side is without attachment, whatever hap of fair and foul, who neither likes nor dislikes, of such a one the understanding is well poised. II/57

The senses are our means of contact with the outside world. Life would be impossible without their constant help. They are, therefore, not to be deadened or weakened, but to be kept in a state of fitness till the very end. The same is true of the mind and the feelings. They are good servants but bad masters. The emotions are springs of energy and provide the

driving power necessary for all human activity. They cannot be suppressed but should be properly trained to serve the individual in the best possible manner.

One quality of a man of steady intellect is that he has his senses well under control. (II/58, 61, 68). An intellect that is subservient to the senses and their pleasures is a weak and deluded intellect and not the right sort of a director for a man's life. (II/60, 63, 67) But a man of self control, whose senses have been trained and disciplined so as to be free from likes and dislikes for sense objects, can move among such objects and even enjoy them, without becoming a slave to them. (II/64)

Sri Krishna also explains the technique of controlling the senses.

It is a psychological fact that the senses (including the mind), when they dwell on sense objects, develop a liking for them, which soon turns into a longing to enjoy them. If fulfilled, the desire grows stronger; if frustrated, it changes into anger. Either strong desire or anger can make a man forget himself and commit acts which he regrets afterwards:

> Dwelling on the objects of sense, man develops an attachment to them, from attachment comes desire and from desire anger sprouts forth. II/62
> From anger arises delusion, from delusion confused memory, from confused memory the destruction of reason, from destruction of reason he perishes. II/63

Since the whole trouble starts with the senses dallying with their objects, the remedy obviously lies in preventing or stopping the association of the senses, not with all objects, but with those which are dangerous or potentially dangerous. Sri Krishna says:

> When, like a tortoise drawing in its limbs, he can completely withdraw his senses from their objects, then is his understanding well poised. II/58

A tortoise draws in its limbs as soon as it senses danger. Likewise the aspirant withdraws his mind and senses from

objects which are undesirable and turns them to objects which are elevating, beneficial or at least harmless. The disciple of Sri Krishna is not required to put his senses out of use but to acquire the ability to turn them away from certain objects and focus them on others, at will. He is not to give up sense enjoyments but to keep the desire for them under control. This is further clarified in verse 64

> But the self-controlled man, while enjoying the various sense objects with senses which are disciplined and free from likes and dislikes, attains to tranquillity. II/64

Complete cessation of sense activity is neither possible nor desirable. But even if it could be realised, it would not necessarily represent a great spiritual achievement, for the senses are not the whole of man. Moreover, one may starve the senses by denying them the objects they seek. But this, far from pacifying the mind, is likely to make its hankering for those objects even stronger. The sign of a tranquil mind is not the forcible starvation of the senses but the ability of the mind to rove among sense objects, or even to experience them, without falling a prey to them.

> Sense objects cease for him who does not enjoy them with his senses, but the taste for them persists This relish also disappears in the case of a man of stable intellect when he sees the Supreme. II/59

As long as the taste for sense objects remains it can suddenly grow strong and overpower the senses any moment. Therefore, what is needed is that the pleasures of the senses should lose their charm for the aspirant, and this will be possible only when he has found a greater source of delight in the form of the Supreme Lord. According to verse 59 the relish for sense objects disappears when the Supreme is seen. This is interpreted by some authorities as saying that all sense attractions cease for a man when he has had a vision of God. But this is neither intelligible nor borne out by the examples of Ravana, Jarasandha, Shishupala and hosts of others whose craving for sense enjoyments never abated inspite of seeing

visions or personifications of God on many occasions. The Gita itself has left no room for doubt on this point. According to Sri Krishna the only true vision of God is the universal vision in which the aspirant sees the Lord everywhere and in all things:

> The Yogi ... sees the Lord present in all beings and all beings existing in the Lord. VI/29
> He verily sees who sees the Supreme Lord abiding equally in all creatures, the imperishable in the perishable. XIII/27

Long and laborious is this twofold discipline—to control the senses and to see God everywhere—required for making the senses obedient servants of the intellect. The senses, when excited, can be so rebellious as to carry away even the mind of a wise man striving for perfection, and when the mind follows the roving senses tamely, the intellect also follows suit:

> O Son of Kunti, the excited senses of even a wise man, though he be striving for perfection, impetuously carry away his mind. II/60

> Just as a gale pushes away a ship on the waters, the mind that follows the wandering senses carries away his discrimination (Prajna). II/67

Knowing the power of the senses, the aspirant not only does his best to control them but also seeks inspiration and strength from God in the acomplishment of this task. The intellect tied to the Lotus feet of the Lord soon becomes steady:

> The Yogi, having controlled them all, sits focussed on Me as the supreme goal. His understanding is steady whose senses are under control. II/61

The man whose intellect is steady and tranquil becomes unshakable by sorrow.

The last four verses are of a general nature and round off the teaching of Buddhi Yoga. The man who has controlled his

self, who is stable in intellect and who sees God everywhere, has a different scale of values from the rest. Enlightened as he is, he assesses worldly pleasures, old customs, rituals, caste and creed, specialised sadhanas and austerities at their true value and does not make a fetish of them, as is done by many people:

> That which is night to all beings in that the self-controlled man wakes. That in which all beings wake is night to the Self-seeing sage. II/69

Reemphasising the need for controlling (not killing) all desires, Sri Krishna says:

> He attains peace into whom all desires flow as rivers flow into the ocean, which is filled with water but remains unmoved, not he who desires enjoyments. II/70

Swami Swarupananda comments: "The ocean is not at all affected by the water flowing into it from all sides. Similarly that man alone finds true peace in whom no reaction of desire is produced by the objects of enjoyment, which he happens to come across during his sojourn on earth". Like rivers entering the ocean, desires never produce a storm in his mind but merest ripples which are soon hushed into stillness.

The next verse reiterates the principal qualifications necessary for enjoying peace in this very life:

> He who lives giving up all desires and free from attachment, egoism and the sense of I and mine, he attains to peace. II/71

The foregoing verses give a description of the Brahmi state in which the individual lives and moves and has his being in God. This state of a Jeewan Mukta is to be acquired in this very life. On attaining this man becomes an image of God:

> Arjuna, such is the state of having one's being in God. None attaining to this becomes deluded. Being established therein even at the end of life, a man gets into oneness with God. II/72

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The Yoga of Action

Introductory

THIS CHAPTER elaborates the principles of Karma Yoga and mentions important reasons why men should work. To emphasise the obligations of the individual to society it presses into service the ancient concept of Yajna or sacrifice, presenting it in a new light, and declares that works done as Yajna do not bind the doer to earth but are necessary for the welfare of the individual as well as the world.

In verse 49 of the second chapter Sri Krishna taught:

> Far lower than the Yoga of buddhi (Intelligence or reason) is action, O Dhananjaya. Take thou refuge in buddhi; pitiable are they who work for fruit. II/49

The real meaning of this verse is that action enlightened by the intellect is far superior to action unsupported by intelligence. But Arjuna, like many others, mistook Buddhi Yoga for Jnana Yoga and so thought this verse to mean that the path of knowledge was far better than the path of works. With this back-

ground he seeks clarification of his doubt in the follc words:

If it be thought by you that Knowledge is superior to Ac O Janardana, why do you, O Keshava, enjoin on me terrible action?]

With these perplexing words you only confuse my ur standing, therefore tell me with certainty the one way which I may reach bliss.]

To dispel Arjuna's doubt Sri Krishna explains that ther a twofold path—the path of knowledge for the contemplativ introverts and the path of selfless action for the active extroverts.

In this world there is a twofold path, as I said before Sinless one; that of Jnana Yoga (Yoga by knowledge) of Sankhyas and that of Karma Yoga of the Yogis. II

The reader will note that the term 'Yogis' as used here Sri Krishna denotes 'Karma Yogis' and therefore by implicat 'Yoga' is 'Karma Yoga'. Although the word Yogi might h been used simply as a short form of Karma Yogi, the dee significance of this usage should not be missed; it means t according to Sri Krishna, Karma Yogis are the Yogis and Kar Yoga is the Yoga par excellence. Though in a few rare instan the word 'Yoga' has been used for the Yoga of meditation a though in its fully developed form Sri Krishna's Yoga has place for all the other varieties of Yoga such as Jnana Yo Bhakti Yoga and Dhyana Yoga, throughout the Gita the Yc taught by Sri Krishna retains Karma Yoga as its basic and mc important component — because Karma Yoga is the foundati of all kinds of Yoga and is the only form of Yoga which capable of transforming the whole of a man's life and personali

In reply to Arjuna's question, Sri Krishna gave his consider opinion that action is superior to inaction:

Perform thou right action, for action is superior to inactio and inactive, even the maintenance of thy body would n be possible. III/

Sri Krishna then develops the theme, explains the necessit for Karma Yoga and its special techniques, and finally declare that by doing his duty in the proper manner man verily reache the Supreme, as did Janaka and others.

Therefore without attachment, constantly perform action which is duty, for by performing action without attachment, man verily reaches the Supreme. III/19

Janaka and others indeed attained to perfection by action III/20

The same assurance has been repeated by the Lord in his final summing up in Discourse XVIII where he said:

> Man reacheth the highest perfection by each being intent on his own duty (Karma). XVIII/45

> He from whom is the evolution of all beings, by whom all this is pervaded, by worshipping Him with the performance of his own duty, a man winneth perfection. XVIII/46

Inactivity, Neither Possible Nor Desirable

Followers of the path of Jnana, Sannyasis and many others try to abstain from worldly works in order to devote themselves exclusively to meditation, japa or other sadhana. Such total renunciation of works is impossible, for says Sri Krishna:

> Nor can anyone, even for an instant, remain really actionless, for helplessly is every one driven to action by the impulses born of nature. III/5

> Even the man of knowledge acts in conformity with his own nature; all living creatures follow their natural tendencies. What shall restraint avail? III/33

Many people believe that if they just sit quietly and do nothing outwardly, they would become free from action as well as its evil effects. Little do they realise that sitting quiet is also a kind of action which must inevitably produce its effects. Moreover, even when a man is outwardly quiet, his mind may be furiously at work, thinking of past mistakes, future plans, sense objects, desires and enjoyments. If such a man believes that he is inactive, he is labouring under a misapprehension, for says Sri Krishna:

> He who strenuously controls his organs of action, yet dwells in his mind on the objects of senses (and desires them), that deluded man has a split personality—active inside though outwardly inactive. III/6
>
> But he excels who restraining the senses by the mind, unattached, directs his organs of action to the path of work. III/7

The truth is that work by itself is just neutral—neither good nor evil. It does not automatically lead to either bondage or liberation. The effects of any work on its doer depend on the way the work is done and the attitude of mind or motive which inspires it. Constituted as man is, he cannot remain actionless even for a moment. Simply by refraining from action man cannot attain the state of actionlessness or perfection.

> Man winneth not freedom from action by abstaining from activity, nor by mere renunciation (of works) doth he rise to perfection. III/4

The proper course for man is not to abandon works outwardly while his mind is running after, pleasures inwardly, but to engage in work, restraining the senses and the mind and relinquishing all personal, selfful interest.

Even a man who has taken to the renunciation of works has to work in order to meet the demands of nature; he must look after his body and provide it with food, clothing and shelter. He has to do all the things required to keep himself in a fit condition. Then what works does he renounce? He renounces, as Satavalekar has wisely pointed out, only the works that would benefit others—because he is too busy with the works for his own maintenance and advancement. He becomes egocentric and selfish. He lives for himself. Sri Krishna Prem, an English devotee of Sri Krishna, explains: "The doctrine of the Karma Yogis starts from the plain fact that a cessation from all action is simply impossible. Even a forcible abstention from the more obvious outer actions will leave the mental actions quite unchecked, and in fact more riotous because of the outer inactivity. Psychologically it is certain that excessive and long continued introversion will have disastrous results upon the

psychic health and—as Jung, I think, puts it—the attempt to escape from all entangling, outer relationships will result in an eventual domination of the ego by relationships of a neurotic and inferior type. Not by mere cessation of activity shall the soul rise to the state of actionlessness—and therefore since action is a necessity, we must make an effort to come to grips with it and prevent it from exerting its fatal binding power on us."

Total abstention from work is neither possible nor desirable. The state of actionlessness, or freedom from the bonds created by action, can be attained not by abstaining from action but by engaging in action and renouncing attachment, selfish desires and the fruits of action.

Necessity for Works

Sri Krishna says:

> Perform thou right action, for action is superior to inaction: and inactive, even the maintenance of thy body would not be possible. III/8

Most of us must work in order to earn a living to support ourselves and our families. But, writes Swami Chidbhavananda: "One ought not to be satisfied with discharging the obligatory duties alone. For they can only maintain man in the excellences he has so far acquired. But there are yet other excellences to acquire. New endeavours are the sure means to it ... man progresses through new enterprises. There are those who hold that doing any new Karma amounts to the creation of an additional bondage. The seeming progress on one side is nothing but bondage to Karma on the other, is the view of these people. They advocate the avoidance of the chimera of action and its dreadful consequence in the shape of slavery to action. But this negative position is untenable. Man can make endless ethical and spiritual progress in life and at the same time remain untethered to Karma."

Hard, agreeable work is a wonderful tonic for both body and mind. It is a law of nature that any faculty or part of the body which is not kept in use rapidly decays. Work, plentiful and

varied, is as necessary for man as food and drink.

No one can exist without working. As a man lives he accumulates a good deal of energy. Unless this surplus energy is provided an outlet in useful or productive work, it is bound to run riot and cause ailments of body and mind. An idle brain is verily the devil's worshop.

Our life is so constituted that each individual has to depend on the help and cooperation of many others. The world is a great collective enterprise demanding cooperation between God and man and between man and man. If a man does nothing for society, he simply becomes a parasite and if many people in a group behave in this fashion, that group would soon perish for want of the essentials of life. Renunciation of temporal work, if practised on a large scale by any society or nation cannot but lead to its extinction or enslavement. Individuals or communities that exalt the ideal of contemplation and religious exercises but belittle work and material progress will have to pay dearly for their inertia.

Work is not only a necessity but also a pleasure. Interesting, absorbing work takes a man out of himself. It makes him forget his worries. It gives him a feeling of usefulness and importance, the feeling of being needed and loved by the group he serves. It gives him a place in society. There is no happiness like that one gets by doing one's duty.

For controlling, stilling and purifying the mind special exercises are often useful. But far more effective and easier are good thoughts and actions, which benefit not only the doer but also society. Nothing can elevate the human personality so much as acts of charity, heroism and self-sacrifice. According to William James, the great American psychologist, we cannot easily change our emotions or thoughts just by "making up our minds to" but we can change our actions, and by changing our actions we automatically change our thoughts, feelings and minds. And the whole man, or even the inner man, can never be fully uplifted if the aspirant does not engage in noble and selfless deeds.

Vinobaji writes: "In the Yoga of desireless action there is a miraculous power. By such action both the individual and society are richly blessed... because he is always absorbed in action, his body keeps pure and healthy... Any society into

which Karma Yogis are born will maintain order, prosperity and goodwill ... Besides these benefits the Karma Yogi also receives the gift of chitta shuddhi, purity of mind ... One's action transforms one's mind. The Karma Yogi's work is a form of prayer (Japa) ... the Karma Yogi, through the terms of his own trade or occupation, gains knowledge of perfection ... What was their trade but a school of the spirit? These actions of theirs were nothing but worship, nothing but service. Viewed from without those actions looked worldly, but inwardly, in reality they were spiritual."

Yajna or Sacrifice

Another great idea introduced in this discourse is that of Yajna or sacrifice which brings out the necessity for disinterested work from a different angle. Works done as a sacrifice are not subject to the ordinary law of Karma. They do not bind the doer to earth. Their sole effect is to take him Godward. Sri Krishna says:

> This world is bound by work unless done as a Yajna (Sacrifice). Therefore, O son of Kunti, give up thy attachments and do thy work as a sacrifice. III/9

Ordinarily the word Yajna indicates special, costly and elaborate sacrifices performed for the attainment of specific objects, Sri Krishna has extended the scope of the term so as to include all kinds of actions whose purpose is to maintain or develop society.

Dr. Radhakrishnan has explained that "the Yajna of the Gita is not the same as the ceremonial sacrifice of the Vedas. It is sacrificial action in general by which man dedicates his wealth and deeds to the service of the One Life in all. People with such a sacrificial spirit will accept even death gladly though unjustly meted out to them, so that the world may grow through their sacrifice. Savitri tells Yama that good people maintain the world through their suffering and sacrifice."

Explaining the concept of sacrifice Sri Aurobindo writes: "Man ordinarily offers his sacrifice openly or under a disguise to his own ego; his oblation is the false action of his own self-

will and ignorance... The man of knowledge, the liberated soul, offers, on the contrary, all his activities to the one eternal Godhead without any attachment to their fruit or to the satisfaction of his lower personal desires. He works for God, not for himself; for the universal welfare, for the soul of the world and not for any particular object which is of his own creation... as a divine agent and not as a principal and separate profiteer in the world commerce."

Swami Chidbhavananda has explained the word Yajna in a very lucid way. He says: "Competition, cooperation and self-dedication are the three ways in which beings make life a fulfilment.... The act of offering the best and the most useful in one for the welfare of others is self-dedication. Both the giver and the receiver stand to gain through this sacred act.... This bounteous act goes by the name of Yajna, which literally means sacrifice. As fresh water springs out from an emptied well, the man who performs Yajna becomes more and yet more enlightened and prosperious.... By sharing one's wealth with all those who have been responsible for its growth, security and further expansion are ensured. The personal weal is ever unfailingly contained in the public weal. Giving effect to this inviolable law of nature is the practice of Yajna.

"Meritorious act untained by selfishness, disinterested service, work of any kind performed for general welfare, adoration of the Almighty, ethical and spiritual endeavours—all these salutary activities are contained in Yajna.

"Dedicating oneself exclusively to spiritual life amounts to the performance of Yajna. Waging a righteous war to wipe out wickedness from the world is an act of Yajna. Increasing the wealth of the country, not for self aggrandisement, but for people's welfare is definitely Yajna. Humble and obscure labourers such as hewers of wood, drawers of water, tillers of soil and carriers of load are also performing Yajna when they assume the attitude that with the sweat of their brow they are serving the Lord and His creation. It is the attitude that transforms the soul-entangling Karma into the soul-emancipating Yajna. Divinity reveals itself best where Yajna takes place. That 'Yajna is Vishnu' is an Upanishadic statement. Performance of Yajna leads man to Shreyas (spiritual uplift)."

Having created mankind in the beginning together with

Yajna, the Prajapati said: By this shall you propagate; this shall be the milch cow of your desires (III/10).

The principle of Yajna is as old as man himself. Mankind and Yajna were both created at the same time by the Prajapati (Creator). Yajna is indispensable not only for the maintenance and development of the human race, but to the individual also it is the giver of desires. Yajna is any organised work done for public good. As members of the vast body of God—such as hands, feet, eye lids, or upper and lower teeth—we are all created to work together for the benefit of all creatures. Without the performance of Yajna humanity would perish—and with it the individuals too. Man is by nature incomplete. Ever since birth he depends on many others for his maintenance. Therefore the law of life is mutual help and cooperation. Every one must pool his resources, knowledge and labour for the common good. This is the key to the well being of both the individual and society. The best way to secure one's happiness is to give happiness to others. Man promotes his own interests best by serving the society of which he is a member.

In this connection Sant Jnaneshwar wrote: "I will now tell you a great tradition on this subject. When the Creator (Brahma) created this institution of the universe, he created all beings (Prani) simultaneously with their duties, which being too subtle, they were incapable of understanding. They all approached the Creator and said: 'How are we to be guided in this world?' Then the Lord said to them: 'We have laid down the proper duties to be performed by you according to your station in life. Perform them and you will find your desires spontaneously fructify. You need not absorb yourself in religious ceremonies. You need not pain the body. Nor go upon long journeys of pilgrimage. You need not practise physical Yoga or give devotion with any motive. You need not worship the minor deities or engage in any fussy activities. Your obligatory duties are the one sacrifice (Yajna) you should offer. Do your duties cheerfully and without desire for fruits.... The performance of duty is the only sacrifice worth practising. Therefore act accordingly. Duties properly done will fulfil all your desires."

In the words of Swami Chidbhavananda, "There is an unfailing way to convert earthly life into a mansion of mirth.... Man is born to give and not to grab. The grabbing man pays

the penalty in the form of misery; the giver reaps the reward in the form of undiluted Joy. The means to give somehow increases in the man who has a mind to give. The resources, the bodily effort and the mental disposition—all these become multiplied in the man of Yajna. His life flowers in being useful to others and fruits in enlightenment."

Nourish the Devas with this; and may those Devas nourish you; thus nourishing one another, you shall reap the supreme good. III/11
Nourished by Yajna, the Devas shall bestow on you the enjoyments you desire." A thief verily is he who enjoys what is given by them without returning them anything. III/12
The good who eat the remains of sacrifice are freed from all sins; but the sinful ones who cook food only for themselves, they verily eat sin. III/13

Devas are the deities who preside over the various departments of Divine Government. A man who invests all his labours and earnings in the Treasury bonds of God's kingdom on earth gets back many times as much as he gives, for a life of Yajna brings him not only the worldly enjoyments he is after but also the supreme good. On the other hand, he is a thief who gives nothing in return for the innumerable good things he receives from the gods. The same ideas are reemphasised in the next verse where it is stated that those who enjoy the goods of life after giving a due share to society are virtuous and are freed from all sins, while the enjoyments of those who keep all the good things of life to themselves, are full of sin. The sharing of the fruits of one's labours with others not so well placed is, according to the Gita, the best of sadhanas, which immediately leads to peace. (XII/12)

As Swami Chidbhavananda has pointed out, "whatever man does must be more beneficial to others than to himself. His doings become Yajna in proportion to their public utility. When a balance is struck between receipts and gifts, a righteous man is he who gives more than he receives. Indebted is that man who appropriates more than he gifts. A thief is he who grabs everything and sacrifices nothing. This seemingly prosperous man ends his career as a nonentity."

According to the Gita man's entire life should be a dedication or sacrifice. Every one should work primarily for the well-being of the entire race and only incidentally for his own advancement and happiness. Humanity first, overselves next. Duty first, rights and pleasures afterwards. This is one definite teaching of the Gita.

Sant Jnaneshwar's comments on verses 11, 12 and 13 are illuminating. He says: "Doing one's duty (Dharma) is tantamount to the worship of the deities, who supply prosperity and security. If you worship the deities, they will be pleased with you, and mutual favour will arise. Then whatever you propose will easily come to pass and all (legitimate) desires of your mind will be encompassed.... You will possess power to command others and the goddess of supremacy will wait on you. ... Those who turn their back on their duty (Dharma), who are filled with the pride of achievement, or are absorbed in objects of enjoyment, will fall a prey to acute unhappiness. They will not only lose prosperity but will find it difficult even to enjoy what they have got.... Whatever one gets by keeping to the path of duty should be spent in satisfying one's obligations and if anything is left over, that should be enjoyed. But they are sinners (and what they enjoy is sinful), who believe that all objects are meant for indulgence, who do not realise that all possessions are meant for performing sacrifices, who are anxious for nice dishes for their own self-satisfaction and who through ignorance and selfishness, indulge themselves. All one's resources are to be regarded as material for offering worship in the form of performance of one's duty."

> Know that Karma has sprung from the Veda and the Veda from the Imperishable. Therefore the all pervading Brahma is ever present in Yajna. III/15

The Lord is personally present in all the works performed as Yajna. (See also IV/24, IX/16 and V/28). Therefore he who directs all his actions to the welfare of the world remains in constant touch with the Lord; he in fact, becomes a partner, a close associate of God, in this business of running the Divine government.

He who does not follow on earth the wheel thus revolving, sinful of life and rejoicing in the senses, he, O Partha, lives in vain. III/16

The wheel of sansar can be kept revolving only by mutual cooperation, by give and take. Even inanimate matter like trees, rivers, wind and clouds and forces of nature like sunshine, are constantly giving themselves away in the service of the world —though involuntarily. Man is required to do the same voluntarily. Any one who makes no contribution to the welfare of the world lives in vain; his life is useless both for himself and for the society which maintains him.

Explaining the principle of Yoga, Sri Aurobindo writes: "... existence is one and its divisions must found themselves on some law of mutual dependence, each growing by each and living by all. Where sacrifice is not willingly given, Nature extracts it by force, she satisfies the law of her living. A mutual giving and receiving is the law of Life, without which it cannot for one moment endure, and this fact is ... the proof that with sacrifice as their eternal companion the Lord of creatures has created all these existences. The universal law of sacrifice is the sign that the world is of God and belongs to God and that life is his dominion and house of worship and not a field for the self-satisfaction of the independent ego."

Gandhiji's comments on these verses are illuminating. He says: "Do your allotted duty, restraining the organs of sense, for that is better than inaction. An idler will only meet his end the sooner for his idleness. But while acting remember that action leads to bondage unless it is performed in a spirit of sacrifice. Sacrifice (Yajna) means exerting oneself for the benefit of others, in a word, service. And where service is rendered for service's sake, there is no room for attachment, likes and dislikes. Perform such a sacrifice, render such service. When Brahma created the universe, He created sacrifice along with it, as it were, and said to mankind, "Go forth into the world; serve one another and prosper. Look upon all creatures as gods, so that being pleased they will be gracious to you and fulfil your wishes unasked." Therefore understand that whoever enjoys the fruits of the earth without serving the people

and without having first given them their share, is a thief. And he who enjoys them after having given all creatures their share is entitled to such enjoyment and is thus freed from sin. On the other hand, those who labour only for themselves are sinners and eat the fruit of sin.... All live by labour; none can remain idle and live, and if this is true of the lower forms of life, it is still more applicable to man. Action takes its origin from Brahma and Brahma from the imperishable brahma, therefore the imperishable brahma is present in all kinds of sacrifice or service. And whoever breaks this chain of mutual service is a sinner and he lives in vain."

Explaining the meaning of the term Yajna, Sri Bhushan Gupta writes in his book *Fundamentals of Gita*:

"The Niyata Karma (allotted duty) has to be performed for Yajna, a chain process through which something big has to be accomplished by a number of people standing firm at their posts of duty, performing their allotted task, and passing on the product to the next link for further processing and similar handing over onwards to others....

"The central idea behind Yajna is that action by an individual is but one process towards the final product and that it is the combination of efforts of the many that completes the working of the whole as one unit. It is therefore essential that each one perform his own function best and keep the cycle of action going by processing the material onwards to the next link. The part that keeps for itself the product of its working disturbs the cycle of Yajna and tends to block the working of the machine. By keeping to himself the fruit of his own actions, he tries to possess that which does not belong to him, and he is verily a thief (III/12).... Again, as the fruit of his own action is but partly baked, his trying to feed upon it upsets his own digestion and his health is affected. He has to know that Yajna is the very law of creation and has to be abided by in order to get his needs fulfilled."

Responsibilities of Great Men

Whatsoever a great man doeth that other men also do; the standard he setteth up by that the people go. III/21

There is nothing in the three worlds, O Partha, that should

be done by Me, nor anything unattained that might be attained; yet I continue to work. III/22
For if I did not continue to work unwearied, men all around would follow My path. O son of Pritha. III/23
If I should cease to work, these worlds would perish; and I should cause confusion and destroy these people. III/24

The example of eminent persons is automatically followed by common folk: and the higher a man's position in society, the more potent the influence of his personality. Great men should be careful to set a good example for others to follow. To drive home this lesson Sri Krishna cites his own example. He is engaged in ceaseless and varied activities for the preservation and progress of the world, though he wants nothing for himself. Likewise even if a man has no need to work for a living, he should still continue to work for the good of others and as an example to others.

Man works for two reasons: the personal advancement of the worker and the good of the society in which he lives. Even when a man has attained God he must continue to work, not for himself but for the welfare of the world—like God himself. No one is exempt from this responsibility. In particular, it is incumbent on all respectable persons to do their best to promote good causes and discourage the evil activities or tendencies in the society of which they are members. (IV/7-9)

Let no wise man unsettle the minds of ignorant people attached to their work. Himself doing all works with faith, he should make others act as well. III/26
Those deluded by the qualities of nature get attached to the functions of the Gunas. The man of perfect knowledge should not unsettle the mediocre whose knowledge is imperfect. III/29

Common people as a rule undertake only those works which would be beneficial to them directly or indirectly. The wise, who may be refraining from works or engaged in selfless activity, should not mislead the common people to abandon their works and take to inaction. On the contrary, by precept and example the wise should encourage the common folk to con-

tinue their activities but only to make them more and more skilful and selfless. It should be clearly understood that working for personal ends and with attachment to the fruit, though inferior to selfless works, is far superior to inaction. The path of progress is from selfish works to unselfish works and not from selfish works to inactivity. "To work for results," writes Swami Chidbhavananda, "is far superior to being given to laziness born of inertia. The indolent man must be roused to ambitions and exertions leading to pleasures and prosperity. Teaching disinterested service to him will unsettle his understanding."

Interested work too has a place in the spiritual evolution of man. It is useful as a preliminary step. But the way of the aspirant should be as follows:

> Surrendering all actions to me, with your thoughts resting on the Supreme Self, from hope and egoism freed, and of mental fever cured, engage in battle. III/30

The aspirant should throw himself into works which are worth doing. But he should undertake them as a servant of God, or on behalf of God, in the firm belief that the works as also their fruits belong to God. His mind should be fixed on the Lord and everything should be done with a view to the Lord's pleasure. He should also free himself from the desire for fruit and the feeling that he is the doer. The Lord is the real doer and man is only an instrument in the Lord's hands. The aspirant should also shake off mental fever, that is he should not be disturbed by the attractions and repulsions of things or the ups and downs of life. Work done in this manner will not be binding in any way out will pave the way to Eternal peace and happiness.

Non-attachment

Non-attachment is one of the most important teachings of the Gita. In fact Gandhiji has called his commentary on the Gita 'Anasakti Yoga or the Gospel of Selfless Action'. The lesson of Anasakti or Non-attachment has been taught in more than twenty verses occurring in ten of the chapters. The relevant verses in Chapters II and III are quoted below:

Perform action, O Dhananjaya, dwelling in union with the Divine, renouncing attachments and even-minded in success and failure; even-mindedness is called Yoga. II/48

He who on every side is without attachment, whatever hap of fair or foul, who neither likes nor dislikes, of such a one the understanding is well poised. II/57

Man musing on the objects of sense, conceiveth an attachment to these, from attachment ariseth desire, from desire anger cometh forth. II/62

He who gives up all desires and moves free from attachment, egoism and thirst for enjoyment, attains peace. II/71

But he excels, O Arjuna, who restraining the senses by the mind, unattached, directs his organs of action to the path of work. III/7

The world is bound by action, unless performed for the sake of sacrifice; for that sake, free from attachment, O son of Kunti, perform thou action. III/9

Therefore, without attachment, constantly perform action which is duty; for by performing action without attachment man verily reacheth the Supreme. III/19

As the ignorant act from attachment to action, O Bharata, so should the wise act without attachment desiring the welfare of the world. III/25

Some of the other verses dealing with this topic are IV/20, 23; V/10 to 12; VI/4; XI/55; XII/13; 18; XIII/9; XV/3, 5; XVIII/23, 26 and 49.

As Non-attachment is a very important lesson of the Gita, it is necessary to understand its meaning clearly. Non-attachment is an attitude of mind, a way of looking at the world, its pleasures and attractions. It does not mean that the aspirant should give up the good things of life or should not love his family and friends, that he should be indifferent to the joys and sorrows of others; that he should be devoid of kindness and sympathy; that he should not enjoy life or make use of the amenities God had made available to him, or that he should go through life as if in a dream — without taking any interest in anyone or anything. Non-attachment means that while you give and receive love, service and help, while you enjoy life and maintain a reasonable standard of living, you have an inner

realisation that worldly pleasures and associations are all fleeting and so you steel yourself mentally against the inevitable partings from persons and things which contribute to your happiness. You will, therefore, cultivate a frame of mind in which such contingencies will not overwhelm you with sorrow or destroy your peace of mind. You will not identify yourself with home, wife or friend nor regard yourself as the owner of the goods which are in your temporary possession. They are not to be discarded but put to the best use without letting your happiness or efficiency depend too much on them. They are gifts of God, given expressly for your help and benefit, but they always remain the property of His government on earth and liable to be withdrawn at His will.

Ramana Maharshi has explained non-attachment or detachment in the following words: "Why should your occupation or duties in life interfere with your spiritual effort? For instance, there is a difference between your activities at home and in the office. In your office activities you are detached, and so long as you do your duty you do not care what happens or whether it results in gain or loss to the employer. But your duties at home are performed with attachment and you are all the time anxious as to whether they will bring advantage or disadvantage to you and your family. But it is possible to perform all the activities of life with detachment and regard only the Self as real...."

Non-attachment is not a gospel of asceticism. It does not require rejection of the amenities of life but only a realistic attitude to them. It is an infallible guide to sane living as well as spiritual progress. It is instructive to reproduce here the wise observations made by J. B. S. Haldane, an eminent scientist, about the relationship between non-atttachment and enjoyment. He says:

"It is commonly held in India that one can only achieve non-attachment by renunciation. I think there is another possibility outlined in William Blake's verses:

He who binds to himself a joy
Does the winged life destroy,
But he who kisses the joy as it flies
Lives in eternity's sunrise.

A scientific study of psychology may show that enjoyment without attachment is a possibility. Certainly it demands considerable self-discipline. And most people in India to-day do not have adequate opportunities to enjoy life. However, I think that just because I have enjoyed life more than most people, I shall be less reluctant to relinquish it. If science can give sufficient knowledge of psychology, and means of applying that knowledge, to prevent attachment to objects of desire, then it will not be senseless to say that it has conquered death."

In his book *The Self You have to Live With* Winfred Rhodes writes:

"Some of the ancient writers used a valuable word when they talked about detachment. The word stands for one of the constructive principles of life. Nothing of a material and temporal kind shall be taken hold of with such a grip that life is made just because of its presence, or spoiled just because of its going. It is possible to take a positive pleasure in seeing what you can do without any yet live happily, wholesomely, progressively. Comfort or discomfort, easy conditions or hard, abundance or scantiness, happiness or unhappiness, these things may come or go, and the spirit still be independent.

"Practise yourself in a reasonable detachment, take life as a great adventure of the soul, elevate your mind to the thought of moving daily as a conqueror in the realm of the spirit, find happiness in learning to do without happiness: do such things and you make life a noble and triumphant experience inwardly whatever it may be outwardly."

Attachment, sometimes also known as Moha, is a child of egoism and the parent of delusion, sin and bondage. On account of attachment a man identifies himself with his body, his kith and kin and his possessions. This would not be so bad but for the fact that the wall which he thus builds round himself effectively separates him from the rest of the world as well as from God. As the worldly things to which he gets attached are all changing and short-lived, attachment invariably becomes a source of anxiety, pain and sorrow. It clouds his intellect, dulls his sense of right and wrong and makes him forgetful of his duties and responsibilities—as it did in the case of Arjuna. It lands a man in selfishness and sin, because in his preoccupation with his own little self or group, he does not hesitate to sacrifice

the larger interests of his society and country. By clinging mentally to certain individuals and things he forges chains that tie him down to the earth.

"The attack", writes Swami Ramdas, "which the divine Teacher directed against Moha is frontal, straight and forceful. Moha denotes attachment to the changing and perishable beings and objects. The soul bound by Moha thinks that his body and its perishable relations are all in all for him. Any loss or destruction of these means for him great pain or sorrow. To mourn over their loss appears to him quite natural and necessary. Arjuna's or any other similarly conditioned soul's predicament is clearly due to a mind absorbed in the consciousness of the body and the external objects. Fear, grief, and anxiety can cease only when the mind is withdrawn and freed from its attachment to these perishable things. To take the mind off the objects and dissociate it from them is the one thing needed."

Egoism

The ego is one of the principal constituents of the human personality. Sri Krishna says:

> Earth, water, fire, air, ether, mind, reason and also the ego—these are the eightfold divisions of my nature. (This is My lower or insentient nature.) VII/4
>
> The five great elements, the ego, the intellect ... constitute the field (body) and its modifications. XIII/5, 6

Ego means the consciousness of self, the feeling "I am something", the feeling of individuality, of I and mine, the feeling that I am distinct and separate from others. This I-faculty is more powerful and subtle than the body, the mind and even the intellect. The ego is the centre round which the whole of a man's life is built. It is the first to appear in early childhood and the very last to go during the final stages of perfection. It is the ego which stands as a barrier between the individual soul and the Universal Soul. All sadhanas aim at the removal of this barrier so that the aspirant may realise his oneness with God and His creation.

Like the human body or intellect the ego is neither good nor bad. It is simply a part of man and its character depends upon the use to which it is put. On one hand, when kept under control, it is the mainspring of all noble ambition and effort and the cause of all progress, goodness and greatness. On the other hand, when left uncontrolled, it is accountable for all the sin and cruelty and misery in the world. The best and holiest of acts become vitiated in the measure they are touched by egoism.

An egoistic person is apt to identify himself with his body and those who subserve it. His ego throws out its tentacles and attaches itself to such persons and things. It draws a narrow circle round itself and regards with indifference or hostility everything outside that circle. Egoism expresses itself in the form of self-love, self-inflation and self-aggrandisement. Some of the gross forms in which it is commonly seen in everyday life are possessiveness, conceit, pride, arrogance, self-glorification, intoxication of wealth and power, wrath, greed and lust.

The Gita has laid very great stress on the eradication of egoism. This lesson has been taught in no less than 20 verses occurring in eight of the chapters: namely, II/71; III/27, 30 XII/13; XIII/8; XV/5; XVI/3, 4, 10, 17, 18; XVII/5, 8, XVIII/17, 24, 26, 35, 53, 58 and 59. For facility of reference some of these verses are reproduced below:

> He who gives up all desires and moves free from attachment, egoism and thirst for enjoyment, attains peace. II/71

> All actions are being performed by the qualities of Prakriti only. The fool, whose mind is deluded by egoism, considers himself to be the doer. III/27

> Surrendering all actions to Me, with thy thoughts resting on the Supreme Self, from hope and egoism freed, and of mental fever cured, engage in battle. III/30

> He who beareth no ill will to any being, friendly and compassionate, without attachment and egoism, even-minded in pleasure and pain, and forgiving.... (he my devotee is dear to Me) XII/13

> Given over to egoism, power, insolence, lust and wrath, these malicious ones hate Me in the bodies of others and in their own. XVI/18

He whose mind is free from the notion of doership and whose intellect is not affected by worldly objects and worldly activities, even though he kills all these people, he does not kill, nor is he bound (by sin) XVIII/17

Having cast aside egoism, violence, arrogance, desire, wrath, covetousness, selfless and peaceful, he is fit to become the Eternal. XVIII/53

Even the gross forms of egoism are very difficult to eradicate. Much more so are its subtle forms like the pride of action or the sense of doership and the desire for praise, honour and fame. Even when a man is leading a virtuous life, is devoted to God and has relinquished the hankering for material rewards, there may still be lurking in him the pride of saintliness and the desire for recognition. The bonds created by the sense of doership are the last to be destroyed and as long as they remain the aspirant's union with God does not become perfect.

In the words of Sant Jnaneshwar, "Eschewing even the idea that 'I am doing this', 'this is mine', the ascetic is free from worldly attachment and therefore enjoys eternal bliss.

Emphasising the necessity for giving up egoism, Swami Ramdas writes in his *Gita Sandesh*:

"The ignorance of the soul lies in his thinking that he, as the individual self apart from the world existence, is the doer. Due to a distorted vision, born of an undisciplined intellect, he fails to understand that God is the real doer. Therefore in the field of action the ego-sense is the sole cause for the bondage of Karma.

"... All the various sadhanas are performed with the one ultimate object of reaching this state of perfect and unqualified self-surrender. Because self-surrender alone destroys the ego-sense and enables the soul not only to realise his immortality but also, through universal vision, to discover his eternal union and oneness with God, who is at once immanent and transcendent. Here is seen the grandest finale to the entire teaching of the Gita."

To overcome egoism combine greatness with humility, wisdom with love, self-regard with regard for others. Enlarge the range of your interests and sympathy so as to include your

society and country. Treat others as yourself. See God in all. Worship God in all creatures. Let all self-seeking be for the sake of self giving. Dedicate your all in the service of God and His creatures.

What Work to Do?

The reader may wonder whether there is any particular kind of work which is specially favourable for spiritual advancement. Since the world pays differently for different kinds of work, it is reasonable to enquire, whether the spiritual value of different professions or callings is also different. Sri Krishna has answered this question in the negative. The spiritual value of an action depends on the way it is done and the feeling that informs it rather than the nature of the work. From the spiritual point of view there is no need to change one's vocation. As a matter of fact, the Lord has strongly advised against forsaking one's duty:

> Better one's own duty, though destitute of merit, than the duty of another well discharged. Better death in the discharge of one's duty, the duty of another is full of danger.
> III/35

All work which is necessary for the maintenance of the world is God's own work; it must be done by some one or other. Different people are therefore required to attend to different kinds of work. Whether one is a teacher or doctor, clerk or mechanic, trader or farmer, warrior or administrator, one is equally a servant of God's government. Any one can reach God by worshipping Him through the performance of his duty, by doing his work skilfully, superbly well and in a spirit of dedication. Among the famous devotees of the Lord were warriors, traders, holy Brahmans, illiterate boatmen, and sellers of meat. Any work can be made into worship of the Lord as explained in verses 45 to 48 of the last chapter of the Gita.

> Man reacheth the highest perfection by each being devoted to his own duty (Karma). Listen how perfection is won by him who is intent on his own duty. XVIII/45

He from whom is the evolution of all beings, by whom all this is pervaded, by worshipping Him with his own duty a man winneth perfection. XVIII/46

Better is one's own duty, though destitute of merit than the well executed duty of another. He who does the duty laid down by his own nature (Swadharma) does not incur sin. XVIII/47

One ought not to give up the work which is suited to one's own nature (Sahaja Karma), O son of Kunti, though it has its imperfections, for every enterprise is beset with imperfections as fire with smoke. XVIII/48

There is, of course, no objection to changing one's profession in order to improve one's position or prospects in life. But whatever a man may be, he has at every moment of his life a certain duty which he must discharge to the best of his ability. The only way to qualify for better jobs is to give full attention to one's present job and to do it as well as possible. But when a man casts covetous eyes on another's job, he not only does his own work indifferently but may also start creating difficulties for others. This is not a healthy state of affairs either for the individual worker or for the organisation where he is employed.

Sri Aurobindo has explained the principles of Swadharma in the following words: "Whatever a man's work and function in life, he can, if it is determined from within or if he is allowed to make it a self-expression of his nature, turn it into a means of growth and of a greater inner perfection. And whatever it be, if he performs his natural function in the right spirit, if he enlightens it by the ideal mind, if he turns its action to the uses of Godhead within, serves with it the spirit manifested in the universe or makes it a conscious instrumentation for the purposes of the Divine in humanity, he can transmute it into a means towards the highest spiritual perfection and freedom."

Not only do all activities necessary and useful for the world lend themselves equally to God realisation, but from this point of view there is no difference even between worldly and spiritual activities. Says Swami Chidbhavananda, "It is customary with people to divide human activities into two distinctive types—the spiritual and the temporal, the sacred and the secu-

lar. But the Bhagavad Gita makes no such artificial distinction. Life pertaining to this world is in no way different from the spiritual. There is continuity and homogeneity in life in all its stages. Man will be in the hereafter none other than what he is here and now. Change of body effects no more change in the personality than does change of clothing. Mode of action it is that makes a person what he is. But action by itself is neither sacred nor secular. The attitude with which it is performed brings about a magical change in it. All actions become sacred in the hands of a spiritual man. On the contrary a man with a material outlook drags down even a sacred act to the vulgar plane. Because of his earth-bound outlook, the uninitiated one fouls sacred acts into secular, whereas the message of the Gita is to metamorphose all actions into liberating sacred ones. This distinctive feature makes the Gita a book of universal application."

The Origin of Sin

In reply to Arjuna's enquiry as to what it is that makes a man do evil, as though driven by an external force (III/36), Sri Krishna stated:

> It is desire, it is wrath begotten by Rajo-guna; all consuming, all-polluting, know this as our foe here on earth. III/37
> As fire is enveloped by smoke, as a mirror by dust, as an embryo by the womb, so is this covered by that. III/38
> Knowledge is covered, O son of Kunti, by this insatiable fire of desire, the constant foe of the wise. III/39

The root of sin is uncontrolled desire. Evil actions have their origin in evil desires. The more a desire is fed, the more hungry it becomes. It is insatiable as fire. It clouds the intellect and leads a man astray. It is man's biggest enemy. To keep out of the path of evil, the aspirant should have his desires under control, he should sublimate them, substituting higher for lower ones. By indulging in noble desires he weakens those which are evil.

Desire resides stealthily in the senses, the heart and the intellect; when it overpowers the intellect, man becomes deluded

and slips into sin. Therefore to slay this enemy in the form of desire, man should control his body, senses, mind as well as intellect. The organs of action should be guided by the senses, the senses by the mind; mind and senses should be governed by the intellect; and the body, senses, mind and intellect should all obey the dictates of the Atma, and all should be attuned to God.

> The senses, the mind and the intellect are said to be its seat; through these it deludes man by veiling his wisdom.
> Therefore, O best of the Bharatas, mastering first the senses, do thou slay this thing of sin, destructive of knowledge and wisdom. III/41
> The senses are said to be superior to the body, the mind is superior to the senses, the intellect is superior to the mind; and what is superior to the intellect is the Atma. III/42
> Thus knowing him as superior to the intellect, restraining the self by the Self, slay, O mighty armed, the enemy in the form of desire, difficult to overcome. III/43

These verses obviously, refer to evil desires. Desires which do not infringe the moral code make for a man's spiritual and moral advancement, Sri Krishna has applauded such desires by identifying himself with them. He says:

> In beings I am desire not contrary to virtue or scriptural injunction. VII/11

An object falls naturally under gravity but requires effort to lift it up. Similarly a man is carried away naturally and spontaneously by evil or selfish desires, but it requires determined effort to cultivate and pursue good desires. This is why a full control over desires has been repeatedly stressed in the Gita and given the first place among the characteristics of a man of steady mind:

> Arjuna, when one thoroughly abandons all cravings of the mind and is satisfied in the self through (the joy of) the Self, then he is called stable of mind. II/55
> As the waters (of different rivers) enter the ocean, which

> though full on all sides, remains undisturbed, likewise he in whom all enjoyments (desires) merge themselves, attains peace, not he who hankers after such enjoyments II/70

Both desire and its opposite, aversion or anger, are necessary in life If they cause a man's downfall, they are also essential for his uplift. It is neither possible nor necessary to kill them altogether. The man of mature mind rules over them instead of becoming a slave to them. And such an ideal person, says Sri Krishna, is in truth a Yogi—a happy man

> He who is able to stand here on earth, before casting off his body, the urges of desire and anger, he is a Yogi, he enjoys fellowship with God and is a happy man. V/23

4

The Yoga of Knowledge, Action and Renunciation

This handed down the line, the king sages knew. This Yoga by great efflux of time decayed in this world, O Parantapa. IV/2

The antiquity of this teaching of Karma Yoga was stressed earlier, in different words by Sri Krishna when he declared:

> Having created mankind in the beginning together with Yajna, the Lord said: By this shall ye propagate, this shall be the milch cow of your desires. III/10
> Nourish the Devas with this, and may those Devas nourish you: thus nourishing one another, you shall reap the supreme good. III/11

Work done intelligently and for the welfare of society is productive of all good here and hereafter. This gospel of dedicated or selfless work is as old as creation and most authoritative, having been taught by the Lord himself; it was practised by the king sages (IV/2) and by our forefathers generally (IV/15), says Sri Krishna. Yet through the passage of time this two-fold Yoga of intelligent action and renunciation was forgotten in our country and the community got divided into two water-tight compartments—men of action and men of renunciation; the former wedded and the latter indifferent, to the world. The path of renunciation (Sannyasa) gradually came to be regarded as the superior, in fact, as the only way to God, and Arjuna himself, when faced with the prospect of having to fight his near and dear and revered ones, expressed a desire to take to Sannyasa. This indeed was the great delusion in the mind of Arjuna and though it was removed by the teaching of the Lord, the same delusion still haunts our country, damning worldly activities as an impediment to spiritual progress and suited only for the novice. True enough, in recent years a number of our great saints, leaders and thinkers have stressed the need for selfless action as an essential part of any scheme of God realisation. Nevertheless, the common folk are still fascinated by the belief that worldly activities, however well performed, cannot lead to a state of true godliness.

It is true that in the best of places those who live dedicated lives, who are men of God and men of the world at the same

time, are in a minority—on account of the growth of materialism. But in our country, the birth place of Sri Krishna and of the highest religion and philosophy, they are in a hopeless minority, because in the name of religion a strong antagonism has been established between worldly activities and the pursuit of God. This was so in the days of Sri Krishna and is so even today, despite the very clear and emphatic teachings of the Gita. The gospel of selfless service is our country's greatest need today. "God", writes Swami Ramdas, "is not merely a silent and immovable spirit but is also the active Master and Ruler of His universal manifestation. To be in tune with God in the infinite silence and immobility of His existence and still be working in the world for its welfare and uplift through His Shakti, which animates and activates His Prakriti, is the real condition of a perfected Yogi." In the words of Swami Sivananda, "The first step in the spiritual path is the selfless service of humanity. Selfless service is the corner stone of the citadel of Bliss-immortal. Selfless service alone can purify your heart and fill it with divine virtues. The gospel of incessant service to humanity is sublime, lofty and grand. Service of humanity, specially of the suffering, is very dear to the Lord. Indeed that is the only royal road to God realisation."

Divine Birth and Action

Though God is in reality unborn, immutable by nature and Lord of all beings, still when circumstances require it, He through His own divine power, takes birth as man. He incarnates throughout the ages whenever righteousness declines, in order to destroy evil and restore virtue. The man who knows this tries to imitate God's actions and reaches Him.

> Though I am unborn, imperishable and the Lord of beings, yet I manifest myself through my own maya, keeping my Prakriti under control. IV/6
>
> Whenever there is decay of dharma and rise of adharma, then I embody myself, O Bharata. IV/7
>
> For the protection of the good, for the destruction of the wicked and for the establishment of dharma, I am born from age to age. IV/8

Radhakrishnan explains: "When once God has granted us free will, He does not stand aside, leaving us to make or unmake ourselves. Whenever by the abuse of freedom unrighteousness increases and the world gets stuck in a rut, He incarnates Himself to lift the world from out of its rut and set it on new tracks. Out of his love He is born again and again to renew the work of creation on a higher plane. According to a passage in the Mahabharata the Supreme who is ever ready to protect the world has four arms. One of them dwells on earth practising penance; the second keeps watch over the actions of erring humanity; the third is engaged in activity in the world of men; and the fourth is plunged in the slumber of a thousand years."

Verse 8 has several remarkable implications.

(1) Righteous conduct is the supreme test of godliness. Dharma is essential for the maintenance of the world. God is ever watchful that individuals and nations tread the path of righteousness. He loves those who practise elementary goodness in their dealings with others. The converse is also true.

(2) God is unmistakably on the side of right. His help is assured to those who are good or victims of oppression. Equally is retribution certain for those who transgress the law of Dharma. To quote Gandhiji, 'Here is comfort for the faithful and affirmation of the truth that Right ever prevails. An eternal conflict between Right and Wrong goes on. Sometimes the latter seems to get the upper hand, but those who are aware of this power of mine are confident that evil is bound to go under...I am always by the good man's side.'

(3) God takes birth and works in the world without being bound by the consequences of his own actions. Man can also remain free if he works like God, that is, without attachment and egoism and for the good of the world. There is no opposition between spiritual life and life in the world.

(4) Even incarnations suffer hunger and thirst, pain and sorrow, privation and hardship. Ordinary mortals cannot, therefore, expect their lives to be beds of roses. They must take courage and inspiration from the lives of incarnations like Rama and Krishna.

Sri Krishna adds that

He who thus knows My divine birth and action in essence,

having abandoned the body, cometh not to birth again, but cometh unto Me, O Arjuna IV/9

How can knowledge of Divine birth and action lead to God realisation? Does it mean that a constant study and mastery of the Ramayana and the Bhagavata, which enshrine the stories of God's principal incarnations, will lead to supreme bliss? Undoubtedly these scriptures are very inspiring. No one can read them without being the happier and better for such reading. But mere reading of the stories of incarnations, however uplifting, is not enough. To know means to grasp with the intellect but to know in essence means not merely to understand but also to act or live accordingly. Man must, therefore, work as God works, he must consciously support the purposes and actively assist in the tasks which bring God down to earth. What is worth doing for the master is worth doing for the servant too, and no devotee of the Supreme Master can remain uninterested in enterprises for the accomplishment of which the Blessed Lord incarnates himself. Far from sitting idle while the Master works, a true servant will always be up and doing in order to assist his master in activities which are dear to Him and to relieve Him of some of His burdens and cares.

And what are the circumstances that prompt God to come down on earth in the form of an Avatar? The major causes, according to verse 8, are the protection of the good, destruction of evil doers and the reestablishment of righteousness. In addition, God is incessantly at work for the welfare of the world and to set an example to others.

There is nothing in the three worlds, O Partha, for Me to achieve, nor is there anything to gain which I have not already got. Yet I continue to work. III/22
For if mingled not ever in action unwearied, men all around would follow My path, O Son of Pritha. III/23
If I should cease to work, these worlds would fall into ruin and I would cause confusion and destroy these people. III/24

Man too must work as God does. Unperturbed by his own happiness or sorow, he should not live as a mere spectator of the good, evil or misery around him. He should not only him-

self do right and refrain from wrong but he should also, like God, support the one and oppose the other. He should always and consciously throw his weight on the side of the good and against the evil. He should give his help and encouragement to all good causes and all activities for the promotion of human happiness, knowledge and cooperation. He should fight, resist or condemn evil to the best of his ability. He must dissociate from wickedness and injustice or at least withhold his moral support from them. He should do his best to relieve human suffering. These duties are specially incumbent on those who occupy positions of respect or authority in society.

All Paths lead to God

Howsoever men approach Me even so do I welcome them, for the path men take from every side is mine, O Partha.
IV/11

This verse is an example of the large-heartedness and universality of the religion taught by Sri Krishna. Dr. Radhakrishnan comments: "This verse brings out the wide catholicity of the Gita religion. God meets every aspirant with favour and grants to each his heart's desire...The spiritually immature are unwilling to recognise other gods than their own. Their attachment to their creed makes them blind to the larger unity of the Godhead. The Gita, on the other hand, affirms that though beliefs and practices may be many and varied, spiritual realisation to which they are the means is one."

The religion of the Gita offers encouragement, consolation and hope to all. It does not threaten the followers of other religions with eternal damnation or hell.

Action and Inaction

According to the law of Karma every one must reap the fruit of his actions, good or bad. As actions continue till the end of one's days, an unending succession of births and deaths seems inevitable as long as a man works. To escape the enormous pain and suffering involved in such a long procession of lives many religious teachers in India have strongly advocated

complete renunciation of home and family and worldly activities. This is a mistaken notion as Sri Krishna has already pointed out in verses 4 to 6 of the third chapter.

It is no wonder if even sages have mistaken abstention from activity for a state of freedom from action, for the point is very subtle, as acknowledged by Sri Krishna himself:

> Sages too are perplexed as to what is action, what inaction. Therefore, I shall tell you how to act, by knowing which you will be saved from evil. IV/16
> It is needful to discriminate action, to discriminate forbidden (or special) action and to discriminate inaction. Inscrutable is the way of Karma. (IV/17
> He who perceives inaction in action and action in inaction, has among men attained real knowledge and he is doing Yoga even while performing all actions. IV/18

It is only a wise man who understands the true difference between action and inaction and the technique of converting action into inaction. He knows that renunciation of worldly activities, although it generally passes as a state of inaction, is really not so. A state of actionlessness is only attained when man works as God does—renouncing egoism, self-ful desires, attachments and the fruits of his labours.

Sridhar explains: "The nature of Karma is to bind man to the wheel of birth and death. But that Karma which is performed without egoism, purely for the glory of the Lord, does not bind man. On the contrary, it disentangles man from the bondage of his previous Karma. To see, therefore, inaction in action is to convert all bondage creating actions into freedom creating actions. Work done for the sake of the Lord has this effect."

Gandhiji comments: "The action of him who though ever active, does not claim to be the doer, is inaction, and the inaction of him who though outwardly avoiding action, is always building castles in his own mind, is action. The enlightened man who has grasped the secret of action knows that no action proceeds from him, all proceeds from God, and hence he selflessly remains absorbed in action. He is the true Yogi."

Rajaji explains: "To perceive inaction in action is to under-

stand and carry out the principle of renunciation of selfish desires while doing the work allotted to or taken up by one. To perceive action in inaction is to realise that external abstinance by itself does not amount to purity of mind and to attain by practice the control of internal desires."

According to Swami Chidbhavananda, "Action belongs to Prakriti. Atman embodied as Sri Krishna is ever established in inaction. Poise in the mindst of purpose, inaction in action—this inspiring principle gets revealed through Yogeshwara... A Yogi ought to be in the world but not of the world. He keeps his head in solitude and hands in society. He works incessantly and enjoys eternal holiday. Through his personal life Sri Krishna offers this grand philosophy of action and inaction to the world."

True Renunciation

An important ingredient in the Yoga taught by Sri Krishna is renunciation—renunciation not of home and family or worldly activities but of self-hood, of attachment and of the fruit of actions. Sri Krishna says:

> Whose works are all free from (self-ful) design and desire, whose actions have been purified in the fire of knowledge, him the wise have called a sage. IV/19
> Having abandoned attachment to the fruit of action, always content, depending on nothing, though engaged in Karma, verily he is not doing anything. IV/20
> Hoping for naught, his mind and self controlled, having abandoned all greed, performing Karma by the body alone, he incurs no sin. IV/21
> Content with whatsoever he gets, free from the pairs of opposites, without envy, even-minded in success and failure, he acts indeed but is not bound. IV/22

The way to attain a state of actionlessness is not through external renunciation of work but through inner renunciation whose chief ingredients are: (1) non-attachment to the fruit of action (2) contentment (3) freedom from greed or reduction of one's personal wants to the minimum (4) freedom from envy

(5) even-mindedness in success and failure and other pairs of opposites (6) renunciation of egoism or sense of doership and (7) control over one's own self.

Gandhiji explains: "Therefore those who do the duty that lies nearest without desire and scheming for the fruit of the action may be said to have burned up their actions in the fire of wisdom (Jnana). A man who has thus abandoned the attachment to the fruit of action is always contented, always independent. He has his mind under control. He gives up all his possessions. And his activity is natural like the bodily functions of a healthy individual. He is free from any pride or even consciousness that he is acting on his own. He has realisation that he is a mere instrument of the divine will. What does it matter whether he meets with success or with failure? He is neither elated by one nor unnerved by the other. All his work is done as a sacrifice (Yajna), that is to say, as service to the world. He meditates upon God in all his actions and in the end comes to him."

Sri Krishna Prem comments: "For certainly the instinct which leads so many to reject the idea of an actionless life inspite of all arguments is a sound one. To reject action is to create a dualism between the Brahman and the universe, which leaves the latter on our hands as a vast cosmic folly, worse than folly, a monstrous cruelty that stinks to the heavens. But it is not so. There is no ultimate dualism in the Reality. It is not action that binds, for the surging tides of the manifested cosmos are as truly the manifestation of the supreme Brahman as is the calm bliss of the stainless witnessing self. What binds us is a wrong attitude to action, the "knots of the heart" which, springing from ignorance, make us fancy that we are so many separate individuals isolated from each other and "free" to perform actions for our selfish ends. This, and not action in itself, is what binds us, and, therefore, it is that Krishna returns again and again to the theme of unattachment to the fruits of action, for there is no freedom for the selfish actor any more than for a bird that is in the meshes of a net."

In the words of Dr. Radhakrishnan, "Action by itself does not bind. If it does, then we are committed to a gross dualism between God and the world, which becomes a cosmic blunder. The cosmos is a manifestation of the Supreme and what binds

is not the act but the selfish attitude to action, born of ignorance, which makes us imagine that we are so many separate individuals with our special preferences and aversions."

Yajna or Sacrifice

As explained in chapter III, Yajna is any action, specially any collective and organised action, performed for the glory of the Lord, or for the good of his creatures, any action which directly or indirectly contributes to human welfare, knowledge or happiness. Eating and resting, study and recreation all become acts of Yajna when their object is not just pleasure seeking or self-aggrandisement but to make oneself a fitter instrument for the service of the Lord. Works done as Yajna, for the common weal, do not create bondage but quicken a man's spiritual progress. Sri Krishna says:

> Of one without attachment, with mind established in knowledge, and who works for the sake of sacrifice, all actions of that liberated man melt away. IV/23

Commenting on this verse Tilak writes: "The person who performs every action in the world unattachedly and for the sake of universal welfare becomes liberated from the entire consequence of the action and ultimately attains release. This stupendous Yajna in the form of dedicating everything to the Brahman is described in the beginning of the next stanza."

Sri Krishna says:

> The act of offering is God; the oblation is God; offered by God in the fire of God; unto God verily he goes who perceives God alone in his action. IV/24

The entire act of sacrifice is divine. God is actively present in all components of every act of sacrifice. Not only spiritual sadhanas but any act done in a spirit of sacrifice—as a dedication to the Lord and for the good of the world—is holy and takes the aspiring soul to God.

Satavalekar explains: "He who sees that the doer, the deed, the technique of doing and the tools of accomplishment are all

manifestations of God, he, seeing Brahma everywhere, himself becomes Brahma. He who sees God in the entire universe and in all activities, he himself becomes the Supreme."

In the colourful words of Sri Krishna, He is the desire (VII/II) that prompts a man to acts of goodness, greatness or self sacrifice and He is also the intelligence (VII/10) and the energy (VII/11) that enable man to accomplish such tasks. In verse IV/24 Sri Krishna declares that He is every act that promotes the welfare of the world and He repeats the same thought in verse IX/16. Further, he is not only every act of sacrifice but even the enjoyer or beneficiary of all sacrifices. (V/29 and IX/24)

By identifying himself with such actions, Sri Krishna has exalted and divinised them. In this way, he has called upon every man and woman to undertake and support such activities as are meant for public good.

Commenting on verse 24, Sri Krishna Prem writes: "Let it, however, once become clear that the manifestation is also an aspect of the Supreme Brahman and it will be evident that there must be a way of action which does not bind the soul. And this is the realisation that now begins to dawn in the heart of the disciple. He sees...that the action, the actor and the act are all so many manifestations of the stainless Eternal, and that if all action be but offered as a sacrifice in the consuming fire of that Brahman, there can be no bondage, for the root cause of the bondage, the ignorance which makes a dualism and a multiplicity where there is in truth but One, is now removed...."

A life of self-sacrifice is a happy life. He who strives for the common good, who regards all his acquisitions as the property of God, and shares them liberally with those not so well placed, who feeds others first and himself afterwards, is assured of supreme bliss. (See also XII/12). On the contrary, he who keeps to himself more than his due share of the good things which he receives from God is a thief; he can have no happiness here or hereafter. Sri Krishna says:

> The eaters of the life giving remains of sacrifice go to the changeless Eternal. This world is not for the non-sacrificer, how then the other, O best of the Kurus? IV/31

Gandhiji writes: "Unless man uses all his physical, mental and spiritual gifts in the service of mankind,, he is a thief, unfit for freedom. He who uses his intellect only and spares his body, is not a full sacrificer..."

It is obvious that before a man can give he must have something to give. He must work hard to acquire wealth, knowledge, power and influence and use them for the benefit of society. The Gita does not idolise the poor man who looks up to others for his sustenance but has nothing to give them in return. He deserves campassion but is not a fit model for mankind to emulate.

True Knowledge

Sri Krishna says:

> Knowledge sacrifice, O Scorcher of foes, is superior to the sacrifice of any objects. All actions in their entirety, O Partha, culminate in knowledge. IV/33
> Even if you are the most sinful of all sinners, yet shall you cross over all sin by the raft of knowledge IV/36
> As the blazing fire reduces fuel to ashes, O Arjuna, so does the fire of knowledge reduce all Karma to ashes. IV/37

Gifts of wealth, food, land or other objects are useful: but many times more useful are the gifts of knowledge, explains Satavalekar. Teachers are builders of the nation. Knowledge enables a man to stand on his own feet; it promotes his worldly as well as spiritual progress. And what is the knowledge which is so precious to the individual? It comprises (a) Vidya or Brahma Vidya, that is knowledge of the Self and (b) A-Vidya or worldly knowledge that enables a man to earn a living and lead a happy, healthy and useful life. Both kinds of knowledge are essential for man. Those who limit themselves to worldly knowledge, ignoring things of the spirit, live in darkness, says the Isha Upanishad: but those who confine themselves to spiritual knowledge to the exclusion of worldly knowledge, live in even greater darkness. The former at least get a measure of worldly success and happiness, but the latter get happiness neither here nor hereafter.

Worldly knowledge includes all arts and sciences, literature, medicine, politics, technology, administration and defence etc. which are necessary for the material welfare of the world. Spiritual knowledge, as explained in the Gita includes, among other things, a knowledge of the individual soul, its relation to the body, to the world, to other souls and to God and the knowledge of the true art of working or the special techniques by which actions make for a man's spiritual advancement without involving him in worldiness.

Knowledge is acquired by the intellect, but true knowledge is that which has been assimilated in one's character and habits. When spiritual knowledge is put into practice it leads to union with God. A man of true knowledge continues all his beneficent activities, still he is actionless for he lives in the world like a lotus in water.

Knowledge, according to Sri Krishna, is not just book knowledge; it is a way of life; a combination of theory and practice. A jnana Yogi is not known by the breadth or depth of what he has grasped by his intellect or by the length of time he can hold his mind steady in meditation or Samadhi. Rather he is known by the character and qualities he exhibits in daily life. (Verses 7 to 11 of Chapter XIII)

To reduce Karma to ashes means to divest it of its property of creating bonds for the soul. Knowldege will accomplish this only if it is applied to the various tasks of life, that is to say, if they are all performed intelligently and skilfully. The raft of knowledge has to be brought into use if it is to render any service in crossing over sin. Knowledge is not a talisman whose mere possession will make evil deeds virtuous or harmless.

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....

The Yoga of Action and Renunciation

Introductory

THE TITLE of this chapter is given as Sannyasa Yoga in some texts, as Karma Sannyasa Yoga in others. These expressions have been variously translated by commentators as The Yoga of Renunciation, The Yoga of Renunciation of Action and The Yoga of Action and Knowledge. But I have called it the Yoga of Action and Renunciation, because action and renunciation are the two principal ingredients of the Yoga taught by Sri Krishna. According to the Gita Yogis must be men of action and at the same time men of renunciation also. Their action is not limited to spiritual sadhanas but includes all pursuits which contribute to the welfare of the world. Their renunciation is not of the orthodox variety. They are true renouncers of all plans and interests (Sarva Sankalpa Sannyasi) because the aim of all their plans and interests is not personal advancement but the service of the Lord and His creation. They do not shun activities but renounce them in effect by dedicating them to God, by performing them for His Sake and for the good of His creation. They do not relinquish all their possessions, but treating

them as a trust held on behalf of the Lord, they use them to the maximum extent for the benefit of His creatures. They give up the sense of doership and regard themselves not as independent businessmen but simply as agents of God.

This chapter opens with a comparison of the paths of renunciation of works (Sankhya or Jnana Yoga) and the path of works (Karma Yoga or simply Yoga). And the Lord declares that

(*a*) both paths can lead to the highest bliss,

(*b*) the path of works is better than the path of renunciation of work, being easier to practise and more beneficent to society as well as to the individual worker,

(*c*) the major disciplines required by the two paths are the same namely (*i*) hard work, (*ii*) a realisation that God is all and in all and (*iii*) a spirit of renunciation.

(*d*) The difference between the two paths is largely in the outward mode of living. Those who pursue the path of knowledge or Sannyasa take to the life of an ascetic, renouncing family and worldly activities. The Karma Yogis, on the other hand, engage in worldly activities but renounce both self-ful desires and the fruits of their labour.

This chapter also re-emphasises some of the major conditions attached to the path of works, such as:

(1) dedicating one's actions to the Lord,

(2) non-attachment,

(3) renunciation of the fruit of action,

(4) even-mindedness or self-possession.

Finally, this chapter describes one outstanding mark of a Yogi, namely his joyous spirit. He is a Yogi, he is a blessed man who has developed in himself the inner strength that conquers the forces born from desire and anger. His happiness does not depend on external objects, circumstances or events. His one characteristic, above all others, is perpetual happiness, because he has on tap the source of supreme bliss within himself, namely his own thoughts reinforced with their constant association with God. Such a Yogi already enjoys the peace of the Eternal and is well set on the way to becoming the Eternal.

Renunciation versus Performance of Action

In the previous chapter Sri Krishna first extolled Knowledge

(IV 36-37) but concluded by calling upon Arjuna to become a Yogi or a man action (IV/42). Arjuna, therefore, felt perplexed and requested the Lord to tell him conclusively which of the two paths is better.

Sri Krishna replied that renunciation and Yoga of action both lead to the highest bliss, but of the two the latter is better. The choice will depend on the ability, aptitude and inclination of the aspirant.

> Renunciation and Yoga (performance) of action both lead to the highest bliss; of the two Yoga by action is verily better than renunciation of action. V/2

Explaining the superiority of the Yoga by action Swami Chidbhavananda writes: "Through the Karma Yoga method wide experience is gained, the divine possibilities in the human being are processed to perfection and benign communion with the Lord's creation is established. These great purposes of life are denied to Karma Sannyasa."

The Lord added that it is only the ignorant who speak of Sankhya (Yoga of knowledge or renunciation of works) and Yoga (Karma Yoga) as different, for in their essentials they are the same.

> Children, not sages, speak of the Sankhya and the Yoga as different; he who is truly established in one obtaineth the fruits of both. V/4
>
> The place which is reached by the Sankhyas (renouncers of action) is reached by Yogis (performers of action) also. He seeth who seeth that the Sankhya and the Yoga are one. V/5

The equality of Sankhya and Yoga arises from the fact that their followers have to develop the same qualities. The true Sannyasi, according to the Gita, is not one who relinquishes home and family and dons a saffron robe, but one who has learnt, through long practice in the humdrum of life, not to hanker after pleasant things or to hate those which are unpleasant. Such a Sannyasi, who has transcended the pairs of opposites, is easily set free from bondage. In memorable words, Sri Krishna Says:

He should be known as a perpetual ascetic (Nitya Sannyasi) who neither hateth nor desireth; free from the pairs of opposites, he is easily set free from bondage. V/3

The reader will note that, as in the case of the Yogi, the Gita's ideal is not a mere Sannyasi but a Nitya Sannyasi: not one who practises asceticism for short periods or on special occasions and then reverts to self-indulgence, but one whose entire life is one of self-denial and self-sacrifice.

Commenting on this verse Swami Chidbhavananda writes: "It is not Sannyasa if a man renounces duty due to dislike; neither is it Sannyasi if he delights in escaping from duty. Selfishness masquerades here as self-denial. Then there is the man who mistakes the inertia in himself for equilibrium. His delight in slothfulness is interpreted as delight in the Self. It is not action but attitude that binds or liberates man. The emptiness of the posed tranquillity gets exposed in tribulation. But the Karma Yogi is proof against imaginary quietude. In the midst of intense activities he is free from likes and dislikes. True tranquillity is, therefore, tangible in him. While acting he is not the agent; while living in the world he is not of the world. Therefore, the Karma Yogi alone is the true Karma Sannyasi."

The right performer of actions who keeps his mind fixed on God, reaches Brahma in no time; but without engaging in the work of the world, which is the essence of Karma Yoga, true renunciation would be very difficult to achieve, says Sri Krishna:

But without Yoga (right performance of action) renunciation is hard to attain; but the aspirant who seeks union with God through right performance of action, swiftly goeth to the Eternal. V/6

Swami Chidbhavananda explains: "The Karma Yogi gets from Prakriti the experience that matures into wisdom. He is a philosopher who translates principle into practice. Theorisation and make-believe have no place in his spiritual career... Life blossoms better in him, who lives for others than in him who lives exclusively for himself. Just as sound sleep is possible only for him who works hard, deep meditation comes to him

who has negated his individuality in the service of others. It is self-denial that brings in purification of the heart. The one pure in mind becomes one with Brahman who is all purity. Here Karma Yoga fruitions in Karma Sannyasa."

Many Jnana Yogis or Sannyasis dread worldly action as a detestable contaminator. But this is not correct, for according to Sri Krishna works performed in the right spirit not merely leave the doer unaffected but actually help in his self-purification.

> The Karma Yogi, who has fully conquered his mind and subdued his senses, whose heart is pure and who knows his own self as the self in all beings, remains unaffected, even though performing all actions. V/7
>
> The (Karma) Yogi, abandoning attachment, performs work with the body, the mind, the intellect and the senses only, for the sake of self-purification. V/II.

"Work," write Swami Sivananda in the *Voice of the Himalayas,* "is worship. Work is *seva* of the Lord".

Essentials of Karma Yoga

Having made a comparison of Sankhya (Jnana Yoga or renunciation of actions) and Yoga (Karma Yoga or right performance of actions), the Lord proceeds to give an outline of the essentials of Yoga. He says:

> Though the Yogi sees, hears, touches, smells, eats, moves, sleeps and breathes, yet he knows the truth and he knows that it is not he who acts. V/8
>
> Though he talks, though he gives and receives, though he opens his eyes and shuts them, he still knows that his senses are merely disporting themselves among the objects of perception. V/9

In these two verses the Gita requires the aspirant to renounce the feeling, "I am the doer," "I have achieved this," "I will accomplish that." Nature, Prakriti or God's power is the real actor and effects its purpose through the body, senses,

mind etc. The human soul is not the doer, it can remain unaffected by the works done by the body, provided it renounces the idea of doership of actions and the ownership of their fruits.

Satavalekar has drawn attention to another benefit of renouncing the sense of doership. When a man regards himself as the doer he works single handed and only with his limited powers. But when he considers that he is acting only on behalf of God he gains access to the limitless resources of God.

Freedom from the effects of action is also obtained by working in a detached spirit and by dedicating the actions to God, Sri Krishna says:

> He who works without attachment, dedicating his actions to God, is untouched by sin, as a lotus leaf is not wetted by water. V/10

Commenting on this verse Dr. Radhakrishnan writes: "When we renounce our ego and its likes and dislikes and place our actions in the Eternal, we acquire the true renunciation which is consistent with free activity in the world. Such a renouncer acts not for his fleeting, finite self but for the Self which is in us all."

Satavalekar explains. "To dedicate works to God means to perform them for the good of all. 'Brahma' means 'all'... The universe is the personification of God. All forms here are His forms... The more we serve the God in all, the better."

In another decisive pronouncement Sri Krishna brings out the importance of renouncing the fruit of action. He says:

> The Yogi, having abandoned the fruit of action, attaineth to Eternal peace; the non-Yogi impelled by desire, attached to the fruit, is bound. V/12

The Yogi has no personal axe to grind but still he continues to work to the best of his ability because he knows that in order to make and keep himself pure (V/II) he must expend his energies in useful activity. In this way he also sets a good example to others and by promoting the welfare of the world he repays his debt to society. As he works in a selfless spirit

and dedicates even the fruit of his labours to God, he attains supreme bliss in this very life. On the other hand, the non-Yogi who works primarily for his own benefit and who clings greedily to what he earns through his labours, remains bound to earth.

Another important characteristic of a Karma Yogi is even-mindedness or equal vision. It is emphasised in verses 18, 19 and 20.

> Sages look equally on a Brahman adorned with learning and humility, a cow, an elephant and even a dog and an infidel. V/18
>
> Even here on earth the entire world is overcome by those whose mind is established in equality. The Eternal is flaw-less, therefore, they are established in the Eternal. V/19
>
> With understanding firm and unperplexed he who knows the Eternal and is established in the Eternal, neither rejoiceth on obtaining what is pleasant nor sorroweth on obtaining what is unpleasant. V/20

The reader will recall that the topic of equality has already been discussed in detail in Chapter II.

To sum up, the essentials of Sri Krishna's Yoga are:

(1) Non attachment (V/10, 11)
(2) Dedication of all actions to God (V/10)
(3) Giving up the sense of doership (V/8, 9)
(4) Renunciation of the fruit of action (V/12)
(5) Even—mindedness in the pairs of opposites (V/20)
(6) Equal vision—seeing God everywhere and in all creatures. (V/18,19)

A Joyous Spirit

This chapter, like others, contains several verses which enumerate the chief characteristics of the ideal man and provide a yard-stick by which the aspirant may measure himself and his progress from time to time. Incidentally they also throw further light on the Gita's conception of 'imperishable bliss', 'happy man', 'peace of the Eternal' and 'Yukta' or 'Yogi'.

> He whose heart is unattached to external contacts findeth

joy in the Self. Resting in union with the Supreme, he enjoys imperishable bliss. V/21
The delights that are contact born verily beget pain; for they have a beginning and an ending, O Kaunteya; not in them may rejoice the wise. V/22
He who is able to surmount here on earth before he quits his body, the force of desire and anger, he is a Yogi (Yukta), he is a happy man. V/23
He who is happy within, who rejoiceth within, that Yogi attains eternal bliss and reaches the Supreme. V/24

These four verses describe in short the state of mind of a Yogi. If the Yogi can be said to have any special outward characteristic, it is, more than anything else, a joyous spirit, a beaming face. A radiant smile, inner happiness and quiet joy are his most outstanding mark. He is not merely even-minded, tranquil or self-possessed; he is positively happy and cheerful.

The ideal man of the Gita has a sane attitude towards the world—its agreeable as well as disagreeable components. He looks upon the good things of life, his family and friends, not as temptations, obstacles or distractions, but as blessings of God given specifically for his physical and spiritual well-being. He makes good use of them—in moderation, with self-control and in a spirit of detachment. However, knowing the uncertain and transitory nature of worldly things, he does not depend on them exclusively but supplements them with two other springs of delight. Of these one lies within himself, and is his own cheerful mind, pure and strong, illumined with noble thoughts and aspirations and the satisfaction of having done his best at all times. His other supplementary source of happiness is God himself, the perennial fountain head of supreme bliss, which keeps his outer and inner springs of felicity constantly replenished and refreshed. The aspirant who adds to his external sources of happiness his own buoyant spirit and who, in addition, keeps the latter brimming over with the joy and power derived from his unbroken fellowship with God, becomes established in imperishable bliss. His heart, which is like a rock to the turmoils of his own life, melts whenever he sees another in distress. Being a light-house of happiness, he has acquired at least one of the great attributes of the Supreme Lord.

Some people believe that what is pleasant cannot be good, that comfort or happiness of any kind is unworthy of an aspirant and that to be a man of God one must be a pauper. This is a false view of religion. God is Sat, Chit and Ananda. A god-like state is one of immortality, all-knowledge and supreme bliss and the attainment of this state is the legitimate goal of human life. All activities, whether worldly or spiritual, are aimed at the realisation of this objective. Therefore as a man advances spiritually his prevailing mood should become increasingly one of unshakable calmness and joy.

The Gita has condemned mortification of the flesh and the depression of the spirits, which both hurt the Lord seated in the heart of all. The ideal of the Gita is not the weeping philosopher, not the kill-joy, but the man with the gladsome heart. This has been repeatedly stressed by Sri Krishna. For example, he says:

> On account of his happy heart all his sorrows are destroyed and soon his intellect becomes steady. II/65

> Cheerfulness of mind, serenity, habit of meditation on God, self-control and purity of heart—these are called austerity of the mind. XVII/16

> Having become one with the Eternal, he neither grieves nor desires. The same to all beings, cheerful in mind, he obtains supreme devotion to Me. XVIII/54

Cheerfulness is not a luxury but a duty. It is not self-indulgence but self-discipline. Itself a sadhana, it is also the fruit of all other sadhanas. It stills the mind. According to the great psychologist William James, even forced efforts to keep smiling soon bring calmness to a sorrowful or agitated mind. A merry heart is a necessary condition for the development of the faculties of the body, mind and soul.

"Smile with the flowers," says Swami Sivananda, "Sing with the birds. And thus vibrate joy, radiate joy, share your joy with others."

The disciple of Sri Krishna smiles and sings his way through life.

Rejoice in the Good of all Creatures

In verse 24 Sri Krishna stated that inner happiness is synonymous with God realisation and by remaining constantly happy any one can attain God. In the next verse the Lord proceeds to explain some of the principal ways by which such happiness may be acquired. He says:

> The holy men whose sins have been destroyed, whose duality has been removed, whose minds are disciplined and who rejoice in doing good to all creatures, attain to the beatitude of God. V/25

According to this verse, in order to develop a joyous spirit the disciple must fulfil the following conditions:

(1) He must be free from sin. Obviously there can be no happiness for a man who indulges in evil thoughts, words or deeds.
(2) His duality has been removed. To him all life is one and the creation is not separate from the Creator. He sees God in all things and all things as merely forms and manifestations of the same Supreme Lord. He moulds his life on the basis of this philosophy.
(3) His mind is disciplined. It is his obedient servant. He has his desires, anger and greed well under control. He does not succumb to petty annoyances and worries.
(4) He rejoices in doing good to others.

To rejoice in the welfare of all beings (Sarva bhuta hite ratah) is one of the principal teachings of the Gita and its importance would be evident from the fact that the same words are repeated in the twelfth chapter where Sri Krishna says:

> Those who worship the Imperishable, the Undefinable, the Umanifest, the Omnipresent, the Unthinkable, the Unchangeable, the Immovable, the Eternal, having restrained all the senses, even-minded towards all and *devoted to doing good to all creatures,* verily they also come unto Me. (XII/3, 4)

The best way to get happiness is to give happiness. When you forget yourself in the service of others you not only banish your worries but also make many friends. When you develop the habit of rejoicing in doing good to others, you acquire a source of happiness—pure and lasting—which can never fail you. As Lecky said, men best attain their own happiness by absorbing themselves in the pursuit of the happiness of others and the conscience of man has always recognised self-sacrifice as the supreme element of virtue. According to Zoroaster, "Doing good to others is not a duty. It is a joy, for it increases your own health and happiness." "When you are good to others", said Benjamin Franklin, "you are best to yourself." Tulsidas declared that there is no religious duty like that of doing good to others.

A pleasure shared is a pleasure intensified and you multiply whatever you share with others—your happiness, your good fortune, your talents and your success. This is not the view of visionaries but sound psychology. Thus the eminent psychiatrist Dr. Alfred Adler used to say to his melancholia patients: "You can be cured in fourteen days if you follow this prescription. Try to think every day how you can please some one." Again, Dr. H. C. Link, Director of the Psychological Service Centre in New York wrote, "No discovery of modern psychology is, in my opinion, so important as its scientific proof of the necessity of self-sacrifice or discipline to self-realisation and happiness."

Explaining the spiritual significance of dedicating oneself to the welfare of others, Sri Krishna said:

> Having known Me in reality as the Enjoyer of sacrifices and austerities, the Supreme Lord of all the worlds and the disinterested friend of all beings, he attains peace. V/29

In the animal world the law of the jungle holds sway—every one for himself and the devil take the hindmost. But even some animals show tender emotions like love of off-spring, conjugal affection, protection of the weak and mutual cooperation. In human beings the sentiment of self-regard exists side by side with the regard for others. The former makes for the preserva-

tion of the individual, the latter for the preservation of the race Man knows that he has to depend upon society for many essential things of life and so his best interests are served by making his group strong, happy and progressive. Godliness consists in advancing with the group, in governing the urge of self-interest with the law of self-sacrifice. The man in the grip of his lower nature lives for himself; to the spiritual man living for others is a perpetual delight.

According to verse IV/24 the Lord is actively present in all Yajnas, that is good deeds done for the well-being of His creatures. All such actions are, therefore, sacred and quicken a man's spiritual progress. In verse V/29, Sri Krishna says that He is not merely present in all acts of kindness, selfless service and greatness but He enjoys them and derives satisfaction from them; in fact he is their ultimate beneficiary.

In verse V/29 the Lord describes Himself as the Ruler of the universe, as friend of all creatures and an enjoyer of all sacrifices and austerities.

As the Supreme Ruler of the creation, God is naturally interested in the welfare of the world. He appreciates all the endeavours of His creatures to make the world better and happier. He rejoices at their success.

As a friend of all creatures, He shares in their joys and sorrows. His happiness lies in their happiness. He cooperates with them. He gladly extends His helping hand to them. He welcomes all efforts to help any of his creatures.

God is also the enjoyer of all sacrifices. He experiences great satisfaction when He sees the noble aspirations, efforts or achievements of His creatures, just as a worldly parent is enthralled to see even the efforts of a toddler to walk. And the acts which gladden the heart of God are not only spiritual sadhanas like meditation, japa, fasts and pilgrimages, but any activity useful for the world such as creative works or acts of heroism, kindness or sympathy, just as a human father feels proud of his son's achievement in any field or department of human activity.

But there is another sense in which the Lord is even more literally the enjoyer of all sacrifices and austerities. Seated in the heart of every creature as his soul and being, the very life of his life, it is really the Lord who is benefited and pleased when-

ever anything is offered or done for the good of any living creature. "God is delighted", writes Satavalekar, "by all acts which benefit mankind, because the four sections of humanity—the Brahmans, Kshatriyas, Vaishyas and Shudras representing the men of wisdom, the warriors, business men and artisans—constitute, respectively, the head, arms, chest and legs of the Supreme Person. As humanity is none other than the concrete form of the Lord, He is pleased by all acts which benefit humanity."

The Biblical story of the Sheep and the Goats puts this idea in very direct and simple words. 'When I was hungry you gave me food; when thirsty you gave me drink; when I was a stranger you took me into your home; when naked you clothed me; when I was ill you came to my help; when in prison you visited me'. Then the righteous will reply, 'Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry and fed you, or thirsty and gave you drink, a stranger and took you home, or naked and clothed you? When did we see you ill or in prison, and come to visit you?' And the king will answer, 'I tell you this: any thing you did for one of my brothers here, however humble, you did for me!'

Enumerating the characteristics of a devotee who is dear to the Lord, Sri Krishna a says that he is one who bears no ill will to any one but is friendly and compassionate to all (XII/13). In days gone by King Ranti Deva said, "I do not long for freedom or salvation with supernatural powers. I only wish that entering the hearts of all creatures I may relieve them of all their pain by taking it upon myself". In recent years Ramakrishna Paramahansa expressed the same wish saying, "Let me be condemned to be born over and over again, even in the form of a dog, if so I can be of help to a single soul."

Man's business in life is to promote this give and take between God, the source and provider of all good things and God the ultimate receiver and consumer of those goods (in the forms of His innumerable creatures). Make yourself a worthy channel for this great world commerce. Make yourself a superb producer and a superb distributor of these goods—wisdom and wealth, goodness and greatness, holiness and health, art and science, literature and technology, adventure and discovery—without coveting what passes through your hands, because it

all really belongs to God. By making your activities less and less ego-centric and more and more altruistic, by dedicating yourself to works for the good of the world, you create triple happiness—happiness for yourself, for others and for God, and this triple happiness is none other than supreme bliss—the beatitude of the Eternal. In this way you make yourself a fit expression of Divine glory and reach the fulfilment of your life.

"Forget yourself entirely,", says Swami Sivananda, "in the sorrows of others. Cultivate a melting heart, the giving hand, the kindly speech, the life of service, equal vision, an impartial attitude. Your life will indeed be blessed. The more you spend your energy in elevating and serving others, the more Divine energy will flow to you."

6

....

The Yoga of Self-Sculpture

Introductory

The title of this chapter has been given by some authorities as Dhyana Yoga (The Yoga of Meditation) and by others as Atma Samyama Yoga (The Yoga of Self Control). I have preferred to call it the Yoga of Self-Sculpture as its main theme is the reshaping of life.

A few stanzas of this discourse (10 to 15 and possibly 18 and 19) explain briefly the technique of meditation. The rest of the chapter gives a picture of the ideal Yogi and mentions the methods of becoming one. This chapter has an importance of its own as it contains some of the best gems of Sri Krishna's teaching leading the disciple to the highest peaks of Knowledge, Works and Devotion.

As meditation is a very popular form of Sadhana, it is necessary to understand its true place among spiritual exercises. The Gita has set its seal of approval on it. But while many teachers consider it the *sine qua non* of Sadhanas, a must for spiritual progress, the Gita does not subscribe to this extreme view. Sri Krishna acknowledges that peace can

be attained by the Yoga of meditation:

> The Yogi ever thus united with the Self, with the mind controlled, goeth to peace, to the supreme bliss that abideth in Me. VI/15

But he has affirmed that peace can also be won by other methods, for example by worshipping the Lord residing in all beings (VI/31) or, what is in reality the same thing, by offering all one's works and their fruit to God:

> He who established in unity worshippeth Me abiding in all beings, that Yogi liveth in Me, even though engaged in all kinds of activities. VI/31
> Whatsoever thou doest, whatsoever thou eatest, whatsoever thou offerest, whatsoever thou givest, whatsoever thou doest of austerity, do thou that as an offering unto Me. IX/27
> Thus shalt thou be liberated from the bonds of action, due to its good and evil fruits, and united (with God) through the Yoga of renunciation (of the fruit of action), thou shalt be set free and come to Me. IX/28

The question arises as to which of the two paths, meditation and the offering of all works and their fruits to the Lord—is the better, easier for the aspirant and more beneficial for the world order. Sri Krishna has laid all doubts at rest by categorically stating in XII/12 that renunciation of the fruit of action is better than meditation and immediately leads to peace.

> Better indeed is wisdom than constant practice; than wisdom meditation is better; than meditation, renunciation of the fruit of action; on renunciation follows peace. XII/12

To throw further light on this rather delicate subject and make a comparison between the Yoga taught by Sri Krishna and that taught by Patanjali, the views of Sri Aurobindo, Sri Krishna Prem, D. S. Sarma and Mahatma Gandhi are given below.

After mentioning briefly the chief characteristics of Jnana Yoga, which is similar to meditation in its approach—Sri

Aurobindo writes: "But this difficult and abstractive method of self negation, however it may draw to it some exceptional natures, cannot satisfy universally the embodied soul in man, because it does not give an outlet to all the straining of his complex nature towards the perfect Eternal. Not only his abstracting contemplative intellect but his yearning heart, his active will, his positive mind in search of some Truth to which his existence and the existence of the world is a manifold key, have their straining towards the Eternal and Infinite and seek to find in it their divine source and the justification of their being and their nature. From this need arise the religions of love and works, whose strength is that they satisfy and lead Godwards the most active and developed powers of humanity, for only by starting from these can knowledge be effective."

Sri Krishna Prem writes in *The Yoga of the Bhagawad Gita*: "This technique is called Dhyana Yoga, the Yoga of meditation, and it corresponds more or less with the method systematised by Patanjali in his Yoga Sutras. But at the very outset it should be clearly understood for whom this practice will give results and for whom it will not. This is vitally important since there are many who consider the practice of meditation as the Yoga par exellence and eagerly seek to practice it without having trodden the all important earlier stages. As stated before, nothing but dangerous mediumistic psychisms or neurotic dissociations of personality can result from the practice of meditation without the qualifications mentioned at the end of the last chapter."

In his book *Pearls of Wisdom* D. S. Sarma writes: "The Yoga of Patanjali's system is a mere channel of mental discipline while the Yoga of the Gita is an ocean of spiritual life. Thus we have in the Gita a grand synthesis.

"All schools were harmonised and from a common platform went forth an appeal for Yoga or union with God. The Gita calls upon all without distinction of Varna or Ashrama to lead a holy life, to seek refuge in the Spirit, to look upon all creatures as aspects of one Reality and to perceive behind the claims of every duty the stern voice of God. That is why though it is addressed to a soldier on the battle-field it comes home to all of us. In a verse which Shankara regards as the very essence of the Scripture, the Gita says:

"He who does My work and looks upon Me as his goal, he who worships Me, who is free from attachments and who is without hatred towards any creature—he comes to Me, O Arjuna". XI/55

The reader will recall that the subject of Yogic exercises is also briefly touched upon in verses 27 and 28 of the fifth discourse of the Gita. Referring to those verses Mahatma Gandhi commented: "These shlokas refer to some of the Yogic practices laid down in the Yoga-sutras. A word of caution is necessary regarding these practices. They serve for the Yogin the same purpose as athletics and gymnastics do for the Bhogin (who pursues worldly pleasures). His physical exercises help the latter to keep his senses of enjoyment in full vigour. The Yogic practices help the Yogin to keep his body in condition and his senses in subjection. Men versed in these practices are rare in these days, and few of these turn them to good account. He who has achieved the preliminary stage on the path of self-discipline, he who has a passion for freedom, and who having rid himself of the pair of opposites has conquered fear, would do well to go in for these practices which will surely help him. It is such a disciplined man alone who can through these practices, render his body a holy temple of God. Purity both of the mind and body is a *sine qua non*, without which these processes are likely in the first instance, to lead a man astray and then drive him deeper into the slough of delusion. This has been the result in some cases people know from experience. That is why that prince of Yogis, Patanjali, gave the first place to Yamas and Niyamas and held as eligible for Yogic practices only those who have gone through the preliminary discipline."

The Yoga of the Gita is for the common man of the world. One can start on it wherever one may be and whatever may be one's calling. The rich and the poor, the learned and the unlettered can all follow it equally. While approving of all the sectional gods, prophets and religions as also of the various special Sadhanas in popular use, it does not insist on any one of them. It prescribes no baptism, rituals, occult practices, or exclusive Sadhana. It teaches a way of living by which the whole of life—and not just fragments of it can become constant,

uninterrupted adoration of the Supreme. The God of the Gita is not hidden in some high and remote heaven, giving special protection to his chosen followers, but is the Lord who is all, who is the *friend* and lover of all creatures, who appears in the form *of the universe, who is seated in the hearts of all beings* and constitutes every atom of their bodies. The Yoga of the Gita is based on reason and not built round particular personalities or scriptures or Sadhanas. It does not divide mankind into warring camps in the name of religion or nationality. Rather, the core of its teaching is universalism—reverence for all life and loving service of all creatures—and not narrow or rigid sectarianism, which condemns the followers of other religions to eternal perdition.

The Ideal Yogi

Sri Krishna says:

> He who does the work he ought to do and does *not seek* its *fruit—he is a Sanyasi and he is a Yogi, not he who* does not work and maintains no sacred fires. VI/1
> Know thou as Yoga, O Pandava, what is called Sanyasa; for none becomes a Yogi without renouncing Sankalpa (personal interests) VI/2

These two verses give a *simple* definition of a Yogi. The ideal Yogi, *according to Sri Krishna,* is one who (1) does all the *work he ought to* do and (2) does not seek the fruit of his labours. In other words, the ideal Yogi is a Karma Yogi. He also possesses the essential qualities of a Sanyasi. Action and renunciation are the two wings on which the Yogi of the Gita flies aloft. This Yoga is not possible if either ingredient is absent.

The ideal Yogi is a man of action. *His energies are available* for all good causes. Efficiently, enthusiatically and diligently he applies himself to the *tasks which are worth doing,* which fall to his lot as duty or are demanded of him by circumstances He works tirelessly for the good of society and to set an example to others. Whatever work he produces is a piece of art, *with* touches of originality and done to *a fine* finish.

Fired by a spirit of renunciation the Yogi is also a true Sanyasi—not in appearance but at heart. He lives in the world like a lotus in water. He regards all the good things of life as gifts of God, held in trust on behalf of the Divine government. He, therefore, gives up the sense of ownership of things as well as the pride of the doership of actions. He does not identify himself with his family, home or possessions. He gives up attachment to them. He makes the best use of them but does not allow his happiness or effectiveness to depend too much on them. He keeps his wants under check and does not hoard unnecessary goods. He lives and works as a servant of God and humanity and not for his own petty self. He, therefore, develops his abilities to the utmost and works as hard as he can. But he knows that everything, including his life itself, really belongs to God. So he uses liberally for the good of others not only his labours but also their fruits, such as knowledge, wealth, power, influence and leisure.

Commenting on these verses Satavalekar writes: "While man cannot for a moment renounce actions, he can renounce, that is give away, the fruit of his actions; he can share them with others who need them. By dedicating the fruit of his labours for the good of others man becomes a Sanyasi."

Swami Chidbhavananda's comments are also very instructive. He says: "No person should ever discard action. Among the doers of duty he is a Sanyasi, he is a Yogi, who discharges duty for duty's sake and is in no way attached to the fruits of his actions. Because of the renunciation of attachment to work and its effect, he is a Sanyasi and because of his doing the duty very efficiently he is a Karma Yogi."

In the next two verses Sri Krishna has reemphasised the importance of these two vital components of Yoga-action and renunciation.

> For a sage who is seeking Yoga, action is called the means; for the same sage, when he is enthroned in Yoga, serenity is called means. VI/3

> When a man feeleth no attachment either for the objects of senses or for actions and has renounced all (self-ful) interests, then he is said to be enthroned in Yoga. VI/4

According to verse 3 action is an indispensable Sadhana for the beginner starting on the path of Yoga. Only when he has acquired some degree of mastery in Yoga, can he employ serenity, that is quiescence and meditation, as a means of further progress. "To reach the highest Yoga", wrote Sant Jnaneshwar, "the ladder is the path of duty. This is the greatest truth in all the Shastras. The abandonment of attachment secures the essence of Yoga." Sri Krishna Prem's comments are similar. He said, "It is in action, disinterested, selfless action, that the way to Yoga lies. Forcible opening of a bud will not produce a blossom and it is only when the disciple is 'Yogarudha', that is firmly established in the path, that the serenity of meditation can be a means of further advance."

In the fourth stanza Sri Krishna has reiterated that inner renunciation is indispensable for a Yogi. Only he can be considered to be accomplished in Yoga who has given up all egocentred desires and attained freedom from attachment to work and their fruits as well as the other objects that appeal to the senses.

Other Qualifications of a Yogi

The guiding principle of the Yogi is self-control. His higher self governs and directs the lower. His intellect, conscience and discrimination rule his baser passions, his restless mind and turbulent senses. He knows what is good for himself and pursues it with missionary zeal. Therefore he is his own best friend.

> He who has conquered his (lower) self, is the friend of himself; but he who has not conquered his self is hostile to himself as a foe. VI/6

As if paraphrasing this verse the *Yoga Vasishtha* says: "One is one's own friend or enemy. If one does not save oneself, there is no other remedy. What is not attained through one's own constant efforts, Vairagya and control over senses, cannot be attained through anything else in the three worlds."

The Yogi must practise moderation in eating and amusement, in sleeping and activity, in fact in all things. He is to be neither

a kill-joy nor a pleasure seeker. He is neither to mortify the flesh nor to give it a free hand for indulgence. Said Sri Krishna:

> Verily, Yoga is not for him who eateth too much, nor who abstaineth to excess, nor who is too much addicated to sleep, nor even to wakefulness. VI/16
> Yoga killeth out all pain for him who is regulated (Yukta) in eating and amusement, regulated in performing actions, regulated in sleeping and waking. VI/17

The full benefits of Yoga cannot be realised unless a man lives a balanced, well regulated life. "Moderation", wrote Annie Besant, "is the key-note of the Gita...."

Sri Aurobindo has offered an alternative but very instructive interpretation of verse 17. According to him the word 'Yukta' which occurs thrice in this verse should be taken in its usual sense of 'united with God'. He says, "This Yoga is not for the man who gives up sleep and food and play and action, even as it is not for those who indulge too much in these things of the life and the body; but the sleep and waking, the food, the play, the putting forth of effort in works should all be yukta. This is generally interpreted as meaning that all should be moderate, regulated, done in fit measures, and that may indeed be the significance. But at any rate when the Yoga is attained, all this has to be yukta in another sense, the ordinary sense of the word every where else in the Gita. In all states, in waking and in sleeping, in food and play and action, the Yogin will then be in Yoga with the Divine, and all will be done by him in the consciousness of the Divine as the self and as the All and as that which supports and contains his own life and his action."

Another major requirement for a Yogi is to cultivate a feeling of equality or equal vision—Samatva. Sri Krishna says:

> The higher Self of him who is self-controlled and peaceful is steadfast in cold and heat, pleasure and pain, as also in honour and dishonour. VI/7
> That Yogi is said to be united (to the Supreme) who is satisfied with knowledge and wisdom, who remains unshaken, who has conquered the senses, and to whom a lump of earth, a stone and gold are the same. VI/8

He excelleth who regards impartially friends, well wishers, enemies, strangers, neutrals, and relatives as also the righteous and unrighteous VI/9

Verses 7, 8 and 9 describe what is known as the Yoga of equality (Samatva) This topic has already been discussed in Chapter II

See God in All

Many saints and religious teachers regard vision of God as a very high spiritual attainment—perhaps even as the acme of perfection The Gita, however, is not content with a fleeting vision of God in a cave or shrine or in one's own heart It requires the aspirant to live in constant communion with God A beatific vision of the Supreme is not included among the characteristic marks of a man of God, be he a 'Sthitaprajna' bhakta, jnani, yogi or one who has transcended the three Gunas Boldly and repeatedly the Gita declares that to see God truly is to see Him at all times, in all things and everywhere, for in reality nothing exists except God Sri Krishna says

> He who seeth Me everywhere and seeth everything in Me, of him will I never lose hold and he shall never lose hold of Me VI/30

The same teaching is repeated in several other verses, for example

> Seated equally in all beings, the Supreme Lord, unperishing within the perishing—he who thus seeth, he seeth XIII/28
>
> Seeing indeed everywhere the same Lord equally dwelling, he doth not destroy the Self and thus treads the highest path XIII/29
>
> When he perceiveth the diversified existence of beings as rooted in One and spreading forth from it, then he reacheth the Eternal XIII/31
>
> Sages look equally on a Brahman adorned with learning and humility, a cow, an elephant and even a dog and an infidel V/18

> Even here in this life the entire world is overcome by those whose mind is established in equality. The Eternal is flawless and the same in all, therefore, they are established in the Eternal. V/19
>
> That knowledge by which one Imperishable Being is seen in all existences, undivided in the divided; know that knowledge to be Sattvica (pure). XVIII/20

In these verses 'seeing' is mostly an act of inner perception, though rare souls may be able to see these things with their physical eyes. Thus to see God in all beings is to be conscious of his active presence in all creatures. To see all beings as residing in the Lord is to perceive them all as resting and living in the body of God, like parts or members of His body. All creatures have the Divine spark in them. In one aspect they are all separate entities, in another they are parts of the same immense life, inter-connected, interdependent, and all together constituting one organic whole.

How to Worship God?

A mere perception of the presence of God in all beings or of their essential unity, is however, not enough. The aspirant must translate his feeling into action. He should not merely see but also worship the Lord abiding in all creatures. Says Sri Krishna:

> He, who established in unity, worshippeth Me abiding in all beings, that Yogi liveth in Me, though engaged in all kinds of activities. VI/31

This teaching of Sri Krishna to worship the Lord abiding in all creatures is even more revolutionary than his advice to see the Lord in all beings.

In common practice the man of the world looks upon other creatures primarily as objects of exploitation, while the man of God regards them as personfications of evil, as traps, obstacles and temptations to be avoided as much as possible. Far from supporting any of these notions Sri Krishna requires all living beings to be treated as objects of worship. As living images of God they are better fitted to receive man's adoration than the

inanimate forms traditionally adopted for this purpose.

Verse 31 requires the aspirant to worship the Lord abiding in all beings—*not the Lord who dwells in some far off heaven, not the Lord who illumines some sacred shrine or Himalayan cave, not the Lord installed as an idol in a corner of the devotees' house, not even the Lord seated in his own heart*—but the Lord who dwells in the hearts of all beings, who is present everywhere, specially in all living things. And how is one to conduct the worship of the Lord abiding in a creature, for example, the Lord who appears in the form of one's father or mother, husband or wife, friend or neighbour, superior or subordinate, client or customer, patient or pupil? This worship obviously cannot be performed in the conventional, orthodox style, by means of arati, flowers and fruits, devotional songs and candlesticks. It has to be performed by tangible offerings of love and service, help and guidance, kind words, thoughtful treatment, gifts in cash or kind or knowledge. According to Satavalekar and several other writers, the original meaning of the word bhajan or bhakti is loving, respectful service. And this is the kind of worship to be offered to the Lord abiding in all beings. Service of living beings is the service of God.

Thus Radhakrishnan explains: "Bhakti is derived from the root 'bhaj', to serve, and means service of the Lord.... The human soul draws near to the Divine by contemplation of God's power, wisdom and goodness, by constant remembrance of Him with a devout heart, by conversing about His qualities with others, by singing His praises with fellow men and by doing all acts as His service." Dr. Radhakrishnan emphasises that participation in God's work for the world is the duty of all devotees and he quotes the *Vishnu Purana* as saying: "Those who give up their duties and simply proclaim the name of the Lord, Krishna, Krishna, are verily the enemies of the Lord and sinners, for the very Lord has taken birth for protecting righteousness."

Satavalekar's comments are even more forthright. He says: "Bhakti means service. True bhakti requires *service* of living beings.... *A son can never satisfy his parents merely* by a constant repetition of their names. Bhakti of one's parents requires helping them in the good activities in which they are engaged, providing them with necessities of life, carrying out

their instructions and acting in a manner which will enhance their prestige."

Even if the traditional meaning of Bhakti is accepted, it is obvious from the experience of practical life and the use of such words as desha-bhakti, matri-bhakti and pitri-bhakti, that bhakti cannot be complete unless it includes loving and thoughtful service. Love unaccompanied by practical deeds is mere sentimentality, if not hypocrisy. Thus Vinobaji says: "One loves one's mother; but this love should express itself in action. Love is constantly striving and expressing itself in the form of service. The outer form of love is service. Love adorns itself with innumerable acts of service and comes out dancing."

Commenting on verse VI/31 Sri Krishna Prem writes: "Wherever he may be and whatever he may be doing, the Yogi is now established in the ever living Divine unity. The torch of the Eternal Krishna has awakened the flame of love in his heart, love the great liberator, the breaker-down of all barriers. Borne out of himself on its rushing wave, he sees no more himself or others but everywhere and in all things the blue form of Krishna flashes forth....

"Worship is a word which conjures up before us ideas of hymns and formal offerings, of churches and temples and of rewards in heaven; but the worship which the disciple now offers is something quite different. It is the worship which gives itself, because it can do no less, the worship of self-forgetful service compelled by the sovereign power of love.

"What need has he of temples when every form enshrines his Lord, and how shall he withhold his service when he sees the Divine beauty distorted by the gloomy ugliness of the world, the Divine bliss masked by the myriad sorrows of men?"

Albert Schweitzer, doctor, philosopher, humanitarian and Nobel prize winner, has coined a new term—reverence for life—which expresses the same idea as worshipping the Lord abiding in all beings. He says: "To every one, in whatever state of life he finds himself, the ethics of reverence for life do this: they force him without cessation to be concerned at heart with all the human destinies and all the other life-destinies which are going through their life course around him, and to give himself, as man, to the man who needs a fellow man.... They demand from all that they devote a portion of their life to their

fellows.... Open your eyes and look for a human being, or some work devoted to human welfare, which needs from some one a little time or friendliness, a little sympathy, or sociability or labour. There may be a solitary or an embittered fellow man, an invalid or an inefficient person to whom you can be something. Perhaps it is an old person or a child. Or some good work needs volunteers who can offer a free evening, or run errands. Who can enumerate the many ways in which that costly piece of working capital, a human being, can be employed? More of him is wanted everywhere. Search then, for some investment for your humanity.... And be prepared for disappointments. But in any case, do not be without some secondary work in which you give yourself as a man to men."

In verse VI/31 the phrase 'established in unity' is to be noted. It requires man to realise that all life is one, that behind all the diversity and conflict of the world is an underlying unity, that all living creatures, though they are apparently separate entities, are united together in the body of God. No individual, no part of the world, can hurt another without hurting the whole and ultimately itself. Conversely, service of any part of the world is service of the world. But promotion of the interests of any individual or nation at the expense of the larger interests of others or of the world is in reality disservice to humanity and, therefore, to the Lord.

See Yourself in Others

Religion, while seeking to unite man with God, should not divide man from man. It is a misreading of religion to think that a man of God must be indifferent to the world. Man has a responsibility both to God and to his fellow men. He cannot ignore either—except at his own peril. But of the two responsibilities the latter is the more fundamental and more important for both his material and spiritual well-being. The Gita has laid very great stress on the social side of religion. In verse after verse Sri Krishna has described the essential unity of the unmanifest God and the manifest creation. The path to God lies in and through the world and the best way to worship God is to worship Him in man and bird and beast. Sri Krishna has laid down two basic principles to guide man in his beha-

viour towards other creatures. The first, as just explained above, is to see God in others and, therefore, to remember that when you are dealing with another you are in reality dealing with an expression of God himself. The second is to realise that your self is the self of others and so you should treat others as if you were dealing with yourself. And the man who fashions his life after either of these principles attains the greatest heights of Yoga or God realisation.

Sri Krishna declares:

> The Yogi who is united to God sees himself in all beings and all beings in himself; everywhere he sees the same. VI/29
> That Yogi, O Arjuna, is regarded as the supreme who judges pleasure and pain everywhere by the same standard as he applies to himself. VI/32

The reader will recall that the same lesson of recognising the self in others as one's own self was taught earlier when the Lord said:

> With the mind purified by Karma Yoga and the self disciplined and the senses controlled, one who realises one's self as the self in all beings, though acting, is not affected. V/7

The meaning of these verses is plain. Love others as you love yourself. Forgive their faults as you forgive your own. Recognise their wants, difficulties and troubles as your own. Feel their pleasure and pain as you feel your own. Rejoice in their success and happiness. Do your best to alleviate their suffering and promote their welfare and development. Man gets his happiness best by forgetting himself in the happiness of others. This is a master key to spiritual progress as well as worldly success.

The man who sees God everywhere, who worships God in all creatures and who feels for others as for himself lives a divine life while still on earth. Of such a one Sri Aurobindo says: "The man born to the divine birth has found the Divine not only in himself, but in all beings. He has realised his unity with all and his equality is, therefore, full of sympathy and

oneness. He sees all as himself and is not intent on his lonely salvation; he even takes upon himself the burden of their happiness and sorrow by which he is not himself affected or subjected. The perfect sage, the Gita more than once repeats, *is ever engaged with a large equality in doing good to all creatures* and makes that his occupation and delight, *sarvabhutahite ratah*. The perfect Yogi is no solitary musing on the Self in his ivory tower of spiritual isolation, but *Yuktah Krishna Karmakrit* (IV/18), a many-sided universal worker for the good of the world, for God in the world. For he is a bhakta, a lover and devotee of the Divine, as well as a sage and a Yogi, a lover who loves God wherever he finds Him, and who finds Him everywhere; and what he loves he does not disdain to serve, nor does action carry him away from the bliss of union, since all his acts proceed from the One in him and to the One in all they are directed."

Radhakrishnan comments: "Atma-aupamya means equality of others with oneself. Even as he desires good to himself, he desires good to all. He embraces all things in God, leads men to divine life and acts in the world with the power of spirit and in that luminous consciousness he harms no creature as he sees that whatever is pleasant to himself is pleasant to all creatures and that what is painful to himself is painful to all beings. He does not any more shrink from pleasure and pain. As he sees God in the world, he fears nothing but embraces all in the equality of the vision of the Self."

Chidbhavananda's comments are also instructive. He says: "Man does not differentiate between the limbs of his own body as high and low. They are all of equal importance to him. The harm done to any limb is harm done to himself, because he and his limb are one and the same. An ordinary man is unassailable in this conviction of his. The Yogi, in his turn, beholds the cosmos as the body of the *Paramatman* and himself as a limb of that Cosmic Personality. One limb in a body does not hurt another; all the limbs function for mutual welfare. The Yogi knows that he and his neighbours are not different; they are all limbs of the same *Ishvara*. So he works for the general welfare of all. That Yogi is Supreme who has this cosmic outlook."

To serve the Lord abiding in all—this is the central lesson

of the *Gita*. The welfare of His creatures is a matter of deep concern to the Lord; and no wonder. Is He not their father, mother, friend, teacher, ruler and protector—all in one? Is He not also the very soul of their souls, the flesh of their flesh and the blood of their blood? And so Sri Krishna has taught this lesson repeatedly and in a number of different ways. The reader may refer to verses III/13, 25; IV/31; V/12, 25; XII/4, 12, 13, 14; IX/27 and XVIII/5.

Sri Krishna assures that the Yogi who is ever conscious of the presence of God about him at all times, everywhere and in all creatures—and who worships the Lord abiding in all beings, that Yogi lives in God; he has already become *Jeevan-mukta;* he has already realised God—whatever may be his calling or religious pursuits.

Become Thou a Yogi!

The Gita's concept of the perfect Yogi has been developed and its various aspects unfolded in this discourse. Towards the end Sri Krishna declares:

> The Yogi is greater than the ascetics, he is thought to be greater even than the man of knowledge; the Yogi is greater than the man of action; therefore become thou a Yogi, O Arjuna. VI/46

The picture of of the perfect Yogi is completed in the last verse which says:

> And among all Yogis he who full of faith, with the inner self abiding in Me, adoreth Me, he is considered by Me to be the most completely united. VI/47

The question naturally arises as to what particular type of Yogi Sri Krishna has called upon Arjuna to become. And how is such a Yogi superior to ascetics, men of knowledge and even men of action?

The votaries of the different kinds of Yoga have all interpreted these verses so as to support their own favourite form of Yoga. In particular, one important school of thought insists

that the word Yogi in verses 46 and 47 means a follower of the path of knowledge, that is a man of meditation. They justify their contention from the title of this chapter which, according to them, is the Yoga of Meditation, and the several verses which explain this Yoga. With due deference to these eminent persons, I must say that their views are not correct. In the first place, since the Yogi has been declared to be greater than an ascetic, a man of knowledge as well as a man of action, it is obvious that the Yoga of the Gita cannot be equated with any of these old traditional paths. Secondly, the whole teaching of the Gita goes against their contention. There are numerous verses which enjoin a full and active life.

As a matter of fact the Yoga of the Gita is simply union with God and it embraces all the means and paths available to an individual. Sri Krishna does not insist on any path to the detraction of others. In many verses (for example VII/17, VIII/7, VIII/14, VIII/27, IX/14, 22, X/10, XII/2, XVIII/57) the word Yoga and its derivatives have been qualified by the words *Nitya* or *Satat* or *Sada*. What Sri Krishna has taught is not just yoga but Nitya or Satat yoga—constant, uninterrupted and all-inclusive union or fellowship with God. The aspirant should be united with God not merely during the few brief moments of prayer or meditation but at all times; not merely during short spells of introspection but also while engaged in mundane activities—even during the clash and din of warfare. He should link up not merely his head or heart or hands to God—but all the various constituents of his self from head to foot. He should divinise his entire life and nature and not just fragments of them. The relationship of Krishna's Yoga to other Yogas is that of whole to individual parts. The former transforms the whole of one's life and character; the latter leave large segments of life and personality uncultured, undeveloped and indisciplined. As W.D.P. Hill observes, "Commentators appear singularly to have missed the intention of these two most important verses. Thus Shankaracharya and Ramanujacharya interpret Jnani in the lower sense, as one who knows the teaching of the sastras or is merely worldly wise. They do not realise that the superiority of the true Yogi consists in the combination in himself of all those elements which upto the time of the *Bhagavad Gita* had been too severely separated; and specially

in the addition of devotion, bhakti, as the most essential element of all...."

Sri Krishna Prem's explanation follows the same line of thought. He says: "Great is the tapasvi, the ascetic who disciplines himself; great the jnani standing firm in the calm knowledge of Reality; great too, the man of action for he is the instrument, albeit unconscious, of the unresting cosmic tide. But greater than all is the Yogi, for he combines in himself all three. United with the Divine Lover in his heart, he sees Him as the One Self in all and offering his disciplined personality on the altar of self-sacrifice, he serves unrestingly the Wisdom—Love that ever plans the welfare of the worlds. He in my opinion is the greatest Yogi of all."

Radhakrishnan explains: "The Yoga which is said to be superior to the tapas, jnana and karma, has the best of all the three and includes devotion also. Such a yogi pours himself forth in utter worship of the Divine seated within the hearts of all and his life is one of self-forgetful service under the guidance of the Divine Light."

As a matter of fact the essence of Sri Krishna's Yoga has already been given in verses 29 to 32 of this chapter. "The Yogi," according to Sri Aurobindo, "is one who seeks for and attains... the union with God alone." And he expounds this theme in several brilliant and inspiring passages. For example, he says: "To see *nothing* but the Divine, to be at every moment in union with him, to love him in all creatures and have the delight of him in all things, is the whole condition of his spiritual existence. His God vision does not divorce him from life, nor does he miss anything of the fullness of life...."

Some Other Important Verses

Let a man raise himself by his own self; let him not debase himself. For he is himself his friend, himself his foe. VI/5

Man is the architect of his own fate. He can rise or fall by his own efforts. His past actions determine his present; his present actions, his future. It is upto man to mould inner and outer nature in order to effect his own evolution. Tilak comments: "These two stanzas contain a description of the

doctrine of free-will (*Atma-Swatantrya*) and propound the principle that every one must bring about his own emancipation and that however powerful Prakriti (nature) may be, it is within one's own hands to conquer it and bring about one's own betterment."

This verse contains the basic principle of the Law of Karma Explaining the role of personal effort *vis-a-vis* predestination or fate, the Yoga Vasishtha says: "We are makers of our destiny by our own efforts. There is no other way to bring about the end of all misery than one's own efforts (*Purushartha*). There is hardly anything in existence which is not attainable through right and earnest exertion. One gets only what one has striven for; nothing is ever achieved by sitting idle. Every one is his own friend or enemy; if one does not save oneself, nobody can save him. There is no other destiny than our own past efforts, now fructifying in good or bad results. Our (previous) actions alone constitute our destiny.... Just as wrong acts of yesterday can be rectified today, so the present efforts can rectify the previous ones. It is the stronger of the two—the past and the present efforts—which subdues the result of the other. In either case, however, it is our own effort that succeeds. Further, it is quite evident that of the two—the past and the present efforts—the present effort can be more powerful, and can succeed against the other, as a youth can vanquish a child; for the past has already been determined but the present is still modifiable."

Let this disconnection from union with pain be known by the name of Yoga. This Yoga should be practised with determination and with an undistracted mind. VI/23

This verse provides one of the definitions of Yoga. The desire to escape pain is the motive power of all Yoga; and the attainment of complete freedom from pain—or supreme bliss, is the final fruit of Yoga. Pain, feeling of inferiority or want, sorrow and suffering—these are perhaps the biggest single incentive for human effort and progress.

Verses 35 and 36 explain the technique of mind control.

Doubtless, O mighty armed, the mind is restless and hard to

> control; but by practice and non-attachment (Vairagya), O son of Kunti, it can be controlled. VI/35
> Yoga is hard to attain, I concede, by a man who cannot control himself; but it can be attained by him who has controlled himself and who strives by right means. VI/36

Though the mind is restless and turbulent, it can be brought under control gradually by (1) sustained practice (2) non-attachment or vairagya and (3) self control, i.e. living a self-disciplined life. As corollaries to these basic principles, the following are some of the indirect but powerful means of stilling and purifying the mind: (*a*) Always keep the mind occupied in useful, beneficent thoughts. An idle mind is the devil's workshop. (*b*) Avoid negative, fruitless thoughts—thoughts of grief, anger, spite, remorse. Overcome the habit of worry. Do not let the mind dwell on trifles or on things which have happened and cannot be helped. (*c*) Have a sufficient number of interests, but not too many. Too many interests may cause mind-wandering. (*d*) A life dedicated to good deeds is the best aid to mind control. Plan your life so that you have always plenty of work to do—work which is interesting, which develops your faculties and is beneficial to society.

> O Partha, neither in this world nor in the next is there destruction for him; for, the doer of good, O beloved, never comes to grief. VI/40

This verse is an assurance to man that the doer of good is the beloved of the Lord and never comes to grief. The world being a creation and embodiment of God, is essentially a place of joy. If the happiness of life is occasionally marred by pain or sorrow, if the world sometimes appears as a vale of tears, it is only because men have transgressed the law or harmed one another. Swami Chidbhavananda explains, "It is open to people to enquire whether this world is intrinsically good or bad. It is God, that is revealing Himself as the phenomenon. The world therefore cannot be anything but good. Viewing it as filled with evil is a misnomer. One of the profoundest pronouncements of the Lord is, 'The doer of good never comes to grief.'

7



The Yoga of True Knowledge

Introductory

THE TITLE of this chapter in Sanskrit is *Jnana Vijnana Yoga.* As commonly used Jnana is knowledge while Vijnana is science or special knowledge. Elsewhere too the Gita has used a pair of similar expressions, for example 'to know' and 'to know in essence'. What is the difference between Jnana and Vijnana; between knowing and knowing in essence? Authorities have translated Vijnana variously as 'Realisation', 'Knowledge of Manifest Divinity', 'Discriminative Knowledge' etc. But the reader whose primary interest in the Gita is to live by its teachings may find the following interpretation both simple and useful.

To know is to grasp by the intellect, to understand and memorise; to acquire ability to reproduce and explain to others.

To know in essence is to assimilate in one's life. Not merely to comprehend certain lessons but also to live and to act accordingly; to practise in daily life what has been learnt mentally.

Jnana or knowledge is what has been grasped intellectually,

what one has understood and can impart to others by word of mouth.

Vijnana or true knowledge is that which has not only been made a part of one's mental outfit but also assimilated in one's life and character.

Ordinarily the man of knowledge is a master of the scriptures and he may also be a brilliant speaker. The man of true knowledge is a living example of what he has learnt.

It would be absurd to think that a Jnani is no more than an intellectual. It is to counter any such misapprehension that two words, 'Jnana' and 'Vijnana', have been used in the heading of this chapter. I have translated them briefly as 'true knowledge'.

Whatever may be the exact meaning of Jnana and Vijnana, it is necessary to appreciate the difference between mere book knowledge or information and the extent of the spiritualisation of one's life and being resulting from that knowledge.

The first six chapters are mainly an exposition and synthesis of knowledge and works. The seventh chapter develops two new topics—immanence of God and devotion—which were both mentioned briefly in the sixth chapter. Chapters VIII to XII elaborate these themes further and give a complete integration of the paths of knowledge, works and devotion.

The Yoga of meditation explained in chapter VI required the aspirant to concentrate his mind on the Lord seated in his own heart. But verses 29 to 32—particularly verse 31—of that chapter opened up another new path: to see and worship the Lord residing in all beings; to feel the presence of God everywhere and at all times.

The present chapter explains the reason for worshipping the Lord abiding in all beings. The universe is an embodiment of God. He inspires, permeates and constitutes every atom in creation. He is all and in all. To offer love, compassion, goods or service to any of His creatures is the true worship of God; it is, in fact, the best way of worshipping Him.

If God were only spirit He would be utterly beyond the reach of man. But fortunately for us, God has also revealed himself in a concrete form—or rather in innumerable concrete forms—in the universe. These living forms are ready, nay eager, to receive man's love and worship on behalf of God,

as His representatives and minor manifestations. To worship God through his concrete expressions in the world is the easiest and best way of worshipping God. It gives pleasant exercise to a man's faculties, develops his personality and at the same time promotes the welfare of the society in which he lives. To drive home the lesson of Verse VI/31, Sri Krishna has cited a number of examples in chapters VII, IX and X etc. of His presence in all objects, movements and activities in the world.

God in the Universe

There are three principal theories in regard to the relationship of God with the universe:

(1) That God created the cosmos out of nothing. This theory is contradicted by all the known facts of science, according to which neither matter nor energy can be created out of nothing.

(2) That God created the world as a potter makes pots out of clay. Potter and clay are different entities.

(3) That God created the world out of himself like a spider producing a cob-web. He is both its material and efficient cause. The world is only a concrete form or manifestation of the Supreme Spirit.

The first and second theories set up a permanent gulf between God and the Universe. It follows as a necessary corollary that the Kingdom of God is not on earth but elsewhere. The world is an antithesis of God and to seek the latter one must reject the former.

Sri Krishna is an exponent of the third theory. God himself has assumed the innumerable forms included in the universe. The world is the playground and kingdom of God. It is potentially divine and sacred. As the human body is the outer covering of the human soul, the universe is the outer covering, or body, of the Supreme Spirit.

Sri Krishna says:

Know that all beings have their birth in this (Prakriti).
I am the origin of all this world and its dissolution as well.
VII/6

There is nothing whatsoever higher than I, O Dhananjaya. All this is threaded on Me as rows of pearls on a string. VII/7

And whatever beings are of Sattva, Rajas or Tamas, know them all as evolved from Me alone; still I am not in them, they are in Me. VII/12

God projects the creation out of himself and resumes it within himself (VII/6, 12). He is the highest power as he does everything and is everything. He holds together all existences, in order and harmony, even as a string holds the gems in a necklace (VII/7). All creatures of innumerable varieties evolve from him, as a whole tree grows out of a seed. They all depend on him for their existence but God continues to exist even when they have all perished (VII/12).

You have not to go far in search of God. You may perceive Him in the smallest of things, in all tastes, in sounds, in light, in smell, in all life, in intelligence, in strength as also in the thoughts, aspirations and activities of human beings seeking to express themselves and rise higher in the scale of evolution (VIII/8 to 11).

I am the taste in the waters, O Son of Kunti, I am light in the moon and the sun, I am the syllable Om in all the Vedas; I am sound in ether and manliness in men. VII/8
I am the sweet fragrance in earth and the brilliance in fire; I am the life in all beings and the austerity in ascetics. VII/9
Know me, O Partha, to be the eternal seed of all existences, I am the intelligence of the intelligent; I am the splendour of the splendid. VII/10
And I am the strength of the strong devoid of desire and passion. In beings I am desire not contrary to Dharma (law), O Lord of the Bharatas. VII/11

These verses contain some of the gems of Gita teaching. Here for the first time the Lord suggests, by implication, that the world is sacred because (1) He himself has created it, (2) He is presiding over it, (3) It is His joy and delight and (4) He is present in all its objects, phenomena and activities.

When He says I am the syllable Om in all the Vedas (VII/8)

and the austerity in ascetics (VII/9), He gives two examples of His existence in the spiritual field. In the same breath, He cites several instances of his presence in things mundane. For example, He declares: "I am manliness in men (VII/8). I am the intelligence of the intelligent (VII/10). I am the strength of the strong devoid of desire and passion; in beings I am desire not contrary to Dharma (Law). (VII/11)."

Manliness, intelligence, strength and such other qualities are the usual stock-in-trade of the man of the world. According to popular belief, these qualities are of the earth, earthy, having nothing in common with godliness. It is to counter this wrong notion that the Lord had to use strong language identifying Himself with these qualities. By extolling these qualities as He has done, He has sought to teach the following important lessons:

(*a*) The glory of God shines forth through a man who is strong, manly or intelligent but not through one who lacks these qualities. The aspirant should, therefore, develop a strong body, a keen intellect, courage and daring, he should not be content to remain a weakling or mediocre or drag on a lifeless existence. The Gita's religion is not one of poverty, weakness, feeble-mindedness or timidity.

(*b*) As God is present even in strength, manliness and intelligence which are primarily used for worldly work, it follows that God is present in all activities, whether sacred or secular. All the work of the world is God's own work and personally sanctified by Him. Science and technology, building and scavenging, cooking and washing, administration and defence, education and farming, business and industry, adventure and exploration are all dear to God and not only austerity and penance, prayer and pooja, meditation and japa, religion and philosophy.

A high level of intelligence may not seem to be very necessary for religious pursuits, but throughout the Gita Sri Krishna has laid great stress on this faculty. He has used several words to denote intelligence, such as buddhi, prajna, mati, dhi and the expression 'Buddhi-yoga' has also been used several times. Intelligence distinguishes man from the lower forms of life. His superiority over them and his special responsibility to perfect himself both arise from the fact

that he is gifted with intelligence. It is only by cultivating and using his intelligence that he can meet the challenges of life. No kind of yoga can be successful without 'Buddhi-yoga'; man needs it even for his survival.

Strength is necessary for health, happiness and success in the world, even for the preservation of life. It may be of several varieties such as strength of body, of nerves, of mind, of intellect, of character and of the soul.

Manliness includes such qualities as courage, bravery, daring, hardiness, fortitude, spirit of enterprise and adventure, perseverance, defiance of difficulties and dangers in the pursuit of the chosen goal.

It will be noticed that in the case of strength and desire Sri Krishna has laid down some qualifications, implying thereby that He is present only in certain types of strength and desire—but not in others. Even though all kinds of strength and desires originate from God, by means of this verse the Lord has drawn a distinction between good and bad varieties of strength and desires. While identifying himself with the former he has, in effect, dissociated himself from the latter. He has not merely approved but eulogised the noble and beneficent types of strength and desires: strength which is unswayed by selfish desire or passion and is used for upholding right or justice, for the defence of the weak, for resistance to aggression, for promoting good causes, or for doing one's daily work in an efficient manner; and desires which seek the well-being of the world and as a part and parcel of it, the well-being of the individual. The Gita calls upon the aspirant to be strong and not weak; to cherish noble desires and root out those which are evil or fruitless.

Why is God Not Seen?

In verse 19 Sri Krishna declares:

> A the end of many births the man of wisdom comes to Me, realising that God is all this. Such a great soul is very rare.
> VII/19

The realisation that the whole universe is a personification

of God comes to the aspirant only after persistent efforts extending over many lives.

The crux of spiritual knowledge is that behind all the diversity and multiplicity of creation is the essential unity of the Godhead, that the whole universe is merely a concretisation of God. This is a very simple truth but its practical assimilation is extremely difficult requiring long practice.

Since God is present everywhere and since everything is a manifestation of him, it is reasonable to enquire why it is so difficult to see him and feel his presence in daily life. Shri Krishna anticipates this question and says that this is due to his Maya or divine illusion.

> Deluded by these threefold dispositions of Prakriti, the gunas, this world does not know Me, who am above them and immutable. VII/13
>
> By the delusion of the pairs of opposites arising from desire and aversion, all beings, O Bharata, are subject to illusion in life, O harasser of foes. VII/27

Just as the human body conceals the human soul, so the body of God, this fascinating and wonderful world, hides the Supreme Spirit. This power of self-concealment is inherent in the Lord and is shared by His creation. In the words of Shri Aurobindo, "He is self-enveloped in this immense cloak of Maya, that Maya of His yoga by which He is one with the world and yet beyond it, immanent but hidden, seated in all hearts but not revealed to any and every being."

God's Maya, though very powerful, does not affect every one equally. Man becomes subject to its delusive power on account of his own desires and aversions (VII/27). Out of his own likes and dislikes he weaves the veil of ignorance which hides God, even though He is ever present before his eyes. The more man gets absorbed in self-ful desires, the more he falls a prey to Maya. Particularly deluded are the evil doers who follow the ways of demons to inflate their ego or get other pleasure by injuring or destroying others. Even the thought of seeking God does not arise in their mind.

> The evil doers who are foolish, low in the human scale,

> whose minds are carried away by delusion and who partake of the nature of demons, do not seek refuge in Me. VII/15

The divine illusion, very hard to pierce though it is, can be crossed over by taking refuge in God, who is the Lord of Maya. Adoration of God is the supreme solvent of Maya.

> Verily this divine illusion of Mine (Maya) made up of the Gunas is hard to surmount, but those who take refuge in Me, they cross over this illusion. VII/14

The transcending of the maya is facilitated if the aspirant not only worships God but also lives a life of purity and goodness. Says the Lord:

> But those men of pure deeds in whom sin is come to an end, they freed from the delusive pairs of opposites, worship Me, steadfast in vows. VII/28

Four Classes of Devotees

The Gita divides virtuous devotees into four categories according to the motive that impels them to resort to God: namely those who worship God for the relief of distress or for the acquisition of knowledge or worldly goods and those who possess both jnana and bhakti and love God without seeking anything in return.

> The virtuous ones who worship Me are of four kinds, the man in distress, the seeker for knowledge, the seeker for wealth and the man of wisdom. VII/16

In this verse the qualification 'virtuous' should be noted. By implication it means that there are some devotees who are not virtuous. We are familiar with examples of people who worship the Lord in order to prosper in wickedness and sin. According to their philosophy of life devotion does not necessarily exclude vice. As a matter of fact, virtue and devotion are two different aspects of the human personality—allied but by no means concomitant. Virtue is not so much the

fruit of bhakti as of self-discipline.

To return to the four types of virtuous devotees. Even the first three types of devotees, who worship the Lord from selfish motives, are noble, says Sri Krishna. This may seem to go against the Gita's principal teaching that all actions should be selfless. But in reality there is no inconsistency, as the two ideas refer to different stages of a man's development.

Complete selflessness is possible only in the final state of perfection or near perfection. Usually a man starts to worship God from self-ful motives, and gradually becomes more and more selfless. Those who worship God for the sake of worldly goods are like students of junior classes in a school. But their efforts are no less commendable than of those more advanced. The lower stages of evolution, because they are far from perfect, are not to be despised; they are indispensable. As a matter of fact, want, distress and desires which turn a man towards God are really blessings in disguise. Sakama bhakti (devotion with worldly desires) is a step in the right direction, which may eventually pave the way to God realisation. Has not Sri Krishna asserted that in beings He is desire not contrary to Dharma? (VII/11).

Explaining the value of Sakama bhakti, Acharya Vinoba writes: "What is meant by Sakama bhakti, interested bhakti? It is approaching the Lord with some desire in the heart. I do not despise this as a low form of bhakti. Many people render public service for name and fame. What is wrong in that? Give them honour; you will do no harm by it. Because they receive honour they will get confirmed in service; and then they will begin to find joy in their work. This desire for recognition, what does it mean ultimately? Through recognition one gets the faith that what one is doing is right. One who has no inward means of deciding whether his service is good or bad, such a one accepts this external test.... Even if the mind is not desireless, does it matter? The important thing is whom one approaches, from whom one begs. There is greatness in begging from the Lord rather than from the world."

The Jnani bhakta, being disinterested, is the most excellent of all. Combining knowledge with devotion, he sees and adores the Lord everywhere and in all things. His whole life and personality are in eternal yoga with God. He remains 'nitya

yukta' (VII/17), that is in constant and unbroken union with the Lord. He seeks nothing from the Lord except the Lord himself. God is supremely dear to such a selfless devotee and he is supremely dear to God.

The ideal of bhakti which Sri Krishna places before mankind is not content with love of God as a mere emotional stirring. It also requires service of the Lord, that is doing His work, with the consciousness that the creation is only a manifestation of God. According to the Gita the passive remembrance or ceremonial pooja of the Lord is by itself only an inferior form of bhakti; and so is the bhakti which confines God to a particular creed, shrine or mountain cave. In the highest type of bhakti the aspirant gives his heart to the spirit of the Lord and his hands and will to His body, namely the manifest creation. He not only keeps the Lord in mind at all times but also engages enthusiastically in works that would please him, knowing full well that as God is all and in all, He can be best served by serving His creatures.

By practising devotion to the Lord one gets hold of a great friend and helper from whom come all the goodness, greatness and happiness in life. As explained earlier, prayer and devotion can be used both for worldly ends (VII/16) and for piercing the veil of Maya (VII/14). By taking refuge in the Lord and striving for deliverance from decay and death, the aspirant can know the secrets of God, the creation as well as Karma (VII/29)

> They who take refuge in Me and strive for liberation from old age and death they know the Eternal, the whole self knowledge and all about Karma. VII/29

A devotee of God commits his whole life and being to God. He invites the light and spirit of God to enter into him and take control of his life. He ever seeks "to discern the mind of God, to think the thoughts of God, to love with the love of God, to live as the agent and instrument of God for working out the ideas of God, both in the world at large and in his own life."

8

Perpetual Yoga

Introductory

THE LITERAL translation of the title of this chapter as given in the Gita is: The Yoga of the Indestructible Supreme Eternal. Dr. Radhakrishnan has called it "The Course of Cosmic Evolution;" Vinobaji has named it the "Yoga of Constancy," *apparently taking a cue from the expression Nitya Yoga* occurring in verse 14:

> He who constantly (satatam) thinks of Me daily (nityashah) and of none else, by him who is a Yogi ever united with the Supreme (nitya yuktasya), I am easily reached. VIII/14

Nitya Yoga is undoubtedly the main theme of this discourse and accordingly I have called it Perpetual Yoga.

The gist of the teaching of this chapter is:

(1) The thoughts and feelings that haunt a man at the time of his death determine the character of his next life.

(2) As the time of death is uncertain and as the thoughts and desires at the time of death are simply those which have

dominated a man's life, it is necessary for him to make a habit of entertaining noble thoughts and thoughts of God at all times. In other words, by constant practice man should endeavour to remain always in union or fellowship with God so that the union will become natural and automatic and will be maintained even at the time of death.

(3) Constant Yoga requires the aspirant to be in communion with God not only during the brief moments of prayer but all day long; to devote to God not only his mind and tongue but his entire personality and to perform all his duties as if he were offering adoration to the Lord.

Principle of Perpetual Yoga

Partial or part-time Yoga is not the ideal of the Gita. The aspirant cannot afford to divide his life into two watertight compartments; one, a very small part, directed towards God and seeking union with Him, and the other, a much bigger part, turned away from God or even working against Him. Man has to devote his whole time and energy all his activities and being to the pursuit, service or remembrance of God. This idea, more than any thing else, is the key note of this chapter, as will be seen from verses 7, 8, 22 and 27 (besides verse 14 already quoted above).

> Therefore at all times remember Me and fight. With mind and reason set on Me, without doubt thou shalt come to Me. VIII/7
>
> He who meditates on the Supreme Person, fixed in the Yoga of constant practice and not wandering after anything else, he, O Partha, reaches the Person Supreme and Divine. VIII/8
>
> He, the highest Spirit, O Partha, may be reached by unswerving devotion (Ananya Bhakti) to Him alone in whom all beings abide, by whom all this is pervaded. VIII/22
>
> Knowing these paths, O Partha, the Yogi is nowise perplexed. Therefore at all times be in Yoga, O Arjuna! VIII/27

The advice to be firm in Yoga at all times must be understood properly. What is the kind of Yoga Sri Krishna wants

n to practise at all times? Does He expect every one to sit a special posture, on a suitable seat and concentrate the nd in meditation, Japa, pranayama (breath control), study formal puja—at all times? If so, it would require a complete ppage of worldly activities, which is neither possible nor sirable, and is, in any case, contrary to his teaching—for He s repeatedly emphasised that work required for the main- nance of oneself, of society and of the world must go on. I/8, 19, 22 to 24 etc.)

It is, therefore, obvious that the Yoga taught by Sri Krishna d required by him to be performed at all times is not the dinary Yoga, meditation or japa, but a special kind of Yoga hich can be practised while engaged in any worldly activity. ri Krishna himself has clarified this in verse 7 where he says: Therefore at all times remember Me and fight." According the Gita conscious remembrance of God, even if it could be onducted all the twenty-four hours, would not be enough or the common man. Side by side with the remembrance of God man must also do his share of fighting by engaging in beneficent worldly activities. Sri Krishna's Yoga has already been explained in earlier chapters. Further light will be thrown on it in the next chapter where the picture of this secret and royal Yoga will be completed. And that is the Yoga, which is Nitya Yoga or Satata Yoga, which every one can practise at all times and which alone can transform an ordinary man into a man of God, Nara into Narayana, Purusha into Purushottama.

Referring to verse 27 Sri Aurobindo writes: "These are the bright and the dark paths... we need observe only the turn by which the Gita closes the passage: 'Therefore at all times be in Yoga.' For that is, after all, the essential, to make the whole being one with the Divine, so entirely and in all ways one as to be naturally and constantly fixed in union, and thus to make all living—not only thought and meditation but action, labour, battle—a remembering of God. 'Remember Me and fight' means not to lose the ever present thought of the Eternal for one single moment in the clash of the temporal, which normally absorbs our minds."

Explaining the principle of Nitya Yoga, Vinobaji writes: "It is good that we worship God for half an hour now and then. Morning and evening, when the beautiful light of the Sun

spreads out its colours, it is an excellent idea to steady one's mind, to forget the world for a while and meditate on the Infinite. We should not give up such habits. But the Gita is not satisfied with them. All our actions from morning till night should become worship of the Lord. Bathing, eating or sweeping, we should think of the Lord. While sweeping we should have the bhavana, the attitude, that we are cleaning the courtyard of the Lord, the master of our life.... The Gita wishes to give us this attitude. Its great desire is to make all our actions into worship of the Lord. To a king of scriptures like the Gita, a half hour puja yields no satisfaction. Its keen desire is that the whole of life should be filled with the Lord and be a form of worship."

The Nitya Yogi or Satata Yogi is the ideal of the Gita. Such a whole time and all round Yogi—every action of whose life is an adoration of God and who dedicates the whole of his personality to the Lord—is superior to ascetics, jnanis, men of action as well as Bhaktas; and combining as he does all forms of Yoga, he comes closest to God. This is the type of Yogi Sri Krishna requires every man and woman to become. (VI/46, 47) The reader may also refer to verses V/3, VII/17, IX/14, 22; X/7, 10, XII/2, 12, 14; XV/5 and XVIII/57, where the idea of Constant Yoga has been emphasised by the use of words like satata, nitya etc.

Thoughts at the Time of Death

Sri Krishna says:

> At the hour of death, when a man leaves his body, he must depart with his consciousness absorbed in Me. Then he will be united with Me. Be certain of that. VIII/5
>
> Whatever a man remembers at the last when he is leaving the body, will be realised by him in the hereafter; because that will be what his mind has most continually dwelt on during his life. VIII/6

The hour of death is a crucial moment in a man's life. At this time of supreme transition the dominant thoughts, feelings and desires of his past life become concentrated and

intensified; and he carries them over, his cherished treasures, to his next life; in fact, it is they that largely determine the form and environment in which he takes birth.

As death approaches, man is usually afflicted with disease, weakness and agonising pain. Quite often he becomes confused and even unconscious. Yet even when he has lost his mental and physical powers, wholly or partly, it is found that he would ask for his sons or daughters or incoherently talk about the things weighing upon his mind. This is because due to emotional attachment and the practice of a life time, his mind has acquired the habit of turning to them naturally and spontaneously. In the same way through long practice over the years man can train his mind to flow automatically and effortlessly to thoughts of God at all times. If a man succeeds in this, there is a good chance that even at the time of death he will think and speak of God—and thereby reach God.

Vinobaji's comments are very instructive. He says: "The thing we practise day and night sticks to us. Let us not be deceived by the story of Ajamila. He was to all appearances a sinner, but hidden deep in his life was a stream of holiness. That came to the surface at the moment of his death. If you imagine that you would remember the name of Rama at the last moment, even if you had been a sinner all your life, you are sure to be disappointed. You will have to train the mind aright from childhood. Take constant care that good sanskaras alone come to the mind."

Radhakrishnan's views are identical. He writes: "We will think of God in the last moments only if we are devoted to Him previously also. *It is not the casual fancy of the last moment but the persistent endeavour* of the whole life that determines the future. The soul goes to that on which its mind is set during the last moments. What we think we become. Our past thoughts determine our present birth and our present ones will determine the future."

If the hour of death has been given so much importance in a man's evolutionary march, it is just to stress the lesson that no one need despair on account of his past. Though past errors cannot be undone, their ill effects can be mitigated or corrected by present actions. Therefore if a man mends his ways he can remake his destiny by his own efforts during the days still left

to him. While there is life there is hope and if a man takes care of the moments as they fly, they will automatically take care of the moment of death as also of the vast eternity that lies beyond. It is the last battle that decides the fate of a war.

It will be seen from verse VIII/7 that reference to what happens at the time of death has been made not in order to unravel the mysteries of death but simply to drive home the necessity of practising Nitya Yoga—of making the whole of one's life an adoration or remembrance of God.

Technique of Constant Yoga

The technique of Nitya Yoga or Constant Yoga is given very briefly in the seventh verse, which is one of the most important and famous verses in the Gita and sums up the essentials of its teaching beautifully:

> Therefore at all times remember Me and fight. With the mind and understanding set on Me, without doubt thou shalt come to Me.
> VIII/7

The reader will at once notice that what the Lord has taught in this verse is required to be practised at all times—and not for a short period weekly or daily. This constant yoga of Sri Krishna consists of two parts namely (1) Always remember Me and (2) Always fight. Neither part, by itself, is sufficient. Both have to go on simultaneously at all times and till the end of one's days. Remembrance of God is symbolic of spiritual effort while fighting includes all worldly work. Constant Yoga is, therefore, a combination, a harmonious blending, of work and prayer. Work and pray ceaselessly. When not consciously engaged in prayer or japa, throw yourself into work for the sake of the Lord so that your work itself becomes a prayer or offering to God. And Sri Krishna assures that "whoever does this undoubtedly comes to Me."

Of the words used by Sri Krishna, "Always remember Me and fight", the injunction to fight was obviously prompted by the occasion. But its universal significance is not to be overlooked; it is really intended to include all kinds of work necessary for the maintenance and progress of the world. Fighting is rather

a dubious, and to some a heinous, form of duty, and when that is required to be performed (in combination with remembrance of God), how much more incumbent it is on man to perform all his other duties which are less controversial, more agreeable, more directly beneficial to himself as well as to society! The word fight has, therefore, been used as symbolic of all work.

Worldly work, however, is required to be combined with a spiritual activity, denoted by the words, "Always remember Me." Now remembrance of God, in common parlance, means japa, dhyana or puja; and I was told that one senior officer used to perform japa uninterruptedly even while he was busy in official work. But this method of doing two important things at one and the same time can hardly be recommended for the average person, as it means divided attention and diminished efficiency. Nor is it necessary.

It is well known that the sub-conscious mind is more or less a reflection of the conscious. Whatever work is done by the conscious mind fondly and frequently is repeated by the sub-conscious and in course of time becomes habitual and automatic, so that the subconscious or inner mind continues with it even when the conscious mind has turned to other engagements. Thus helping and relieving each other, these two parts of the brain can manage both the tasks—remembrance of God and worldly works—without break or mutual interference, when the whole mind has been polarised towards God.

Like the word 'fight, 'remember' has been used by Sri Krishna in a very broad sense. Since God is to be remembered at all times, the remembrance cannot be limited to thought (meditation) and word (japa) alone, but must also be accomplished through actions, which necessarily occupy the bulk of one's waking hours. And this is not very difficult if you bear in mind that all the work you are doing really belongs to God. Therefore, if you consciously work for God, with God and for his pleasure, if at the back of your mind you have feeling that you are an employee of His government, then your work itself will become a remembrance or adoration of God. This is explained further in the next chapter (IX/27, 28). The reader may also see verses 45 and 46 of chapter XVIII.

There are many ways in which you can consciously remember God. For example, you can think with gratitude of the

numerous blessings He keeps conferring on you. You can pray for His guidance and help as often as necessary. Thank Him whenever you are able to do something worthwhile. Feel and appreciate His presence wherever you find goodness, holiness, wisdom, greatness or genius. Try to see Him in all the persons and things you come across in your work-a-day life. He who perceives and worships the Lord abiding in all creatures ever lives in God even though engaged in all kinds of activities.

Some other important aspects of Nitya Yoga are brought out in verses 8, 14 and 22 already quoted earlier.

According to verse 8 proficiency in Perpetual Yoga is not possible without long practice. The intellect has to be trained for years before it can be firmly fixed on the Supreme. "It is not death-bed repentance", says Dr. Radhakrishnan, "that will save us but constant practice and unwavering dedication to the Supreme." The reader may also see verse VI/35.

The same lesson of Perpetual Yoga has been taught in verses 14 and 22 through the concept of 'Ananya'. 'Ananya chetah' has generally been translated as: "with the mind not thinking of any other object", as if worldly objects are separate from God. But according to Satavalekar this expression means "with the mind thinking that there is nothing other than God". The latter rendering is in conformity with the general teaching of the Gita and follows the interpretation given by Tulsidas in his *Ram Charita Manas*. At their first meeting in the forest of Kishkindha, Sri Ram explains, "Hanuman, he alone is Ananya who is steadfast in his conviction that he is a servant and his master is the Supreme Lord manifested in the form of the whole animate and inanimate creation."

Therefore, Ananya bhakti is devotion which recognises that Vasudeva is all, that there is none other than He, that all beings are His expressions and all work is His work. There is no better aid to the Yoga of Constant Union than Ananya bhakti. A man can easily reach God when he sees God in all objects, loves and serves Him in all creatures and develops the consciousness that all his dealings and relationships in life are only with forms or manifestations of the Supreme Lord.

To bring home the lesson of Nitya Yoga the views of some eminent persons are given below.

Vinobaji says: "A man who is ever busy doing his duty is

worshipping God through work. But the moisture, the rasa of love, should go into the worship, 'Mam anusmara yudhya cha', 'Work with Me in mind'. Yes, work is puja, worship. But the bhavana within should be kept alive. The mere offering of flowers is not puja. There must go with it bhavana, the appropriate inner attitude. Puja with flowers is one way of worship; doing good actions is another way. But in both the moisture of bhavana is essential. If when we offer flowers there is no bhavana within, it is as if we are flinging flowers on a mere stone."

How a European devotee of God, Brother Lawrence, advised his friends to remember God as often as possible is explained in the following quotation from *The Practice of the Presence of God:* "He requires no great matters of us; a little remembrance of Him from time to time; a little adoration; sometimes to pray for His grace, sometimes to offer Him your sufferings, and sometimes to return Him thanks for the favours He has given you, and still gives you, in the midst of your troubles, and to console yourself with Him the oftenest you can. Lift up your heart to Him even at your meals and when you are in company; the least little remembrance will always be acceptable to Him. You need not cry very loud; He is nearer to us than we are aware of."

Swami Chidbhavananda comments: "There are people who neglect or give up their earthly duties on the plea that they have taken to spiritual life. And there are the others who excuse themselves from spiritual practices on the plea that in the midst of their worldly engagements they have neither the time nor the inclination for anything else. The sacred and the secular are incompatible, is their view. But the Lord's message is to sanctify the entire life. The so-called secular duty may be converted into the service of the Lord. Whatever man does or thinks ought to be for the glory of the Maker. By this way man's life gets perfectly enriched."

The Higher and the Lower Unmanifest

Different philosophers, prophets and religions have put forward different views of God. But they are all unanimous in describing God as unmanifest—completely hidden from view, unperceivable by the senses and incomprehensible by the intel-

numerous blessings He keeps conferring on you. You can pray for His guidance and help as often as necessary. Thank Him whenever you are able to do something worthwhile. Feel and appreciate His presence wherever you find goodness, holiness, wisdom, greatness or genius. Try to see Him in all the persons and things you come across in your work-a-day life. He who perceives and worships the Lord abiding in all creatures ever lives in God even though engaged in all kinds of activities.

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The Higher and the Lower Unmanifest

Different philosophers, prophets and religions have put forward different views of God. But they are all unanimous in describing God as unmanifest—completely hidden from view, unperceivable by the senses and incomprehensible by the intel-

lect. The Gita, in propounding its own ideas about God, has drawn attention to His two important aspects—both unmanifest but one, lower and partial and the other, higher and complete. The lower unmanifest is the absolute, impersonal, quiescent, feelingless God who is unconcerned with the creation and the worries of its creatures. He ever remains in a state of repose or contemplation. The higher unmanifest, known as Purushottama, has all the properties and powers of the lower unmanifest and many others besides, which the lower unmanifest lacks. The Purushottama is both absolute and relative, personal and impersonal, perfect and imperfect, inactive and ever active, unmanifest and yet manifested in all the innumerable objects, living as well as non-living. Above all, the Purushottama includes the entire creation, is incessantly at work through the forces of nature and in the form of His countless creatures. He shares in their joys and sorrows and is ready to extend to them His hand of friendship.

All embodied beings emanate from the Unmanifest at the commencement of Brahma's day; at the commencement of his night they merge in the same subtle body of Brahma, known as the Unmanifest. VIII/18

Arjuna, this multitude of beings, being born again and again, under compulsion from Prakriti, is dissolved at the beginning of Brahma's night and rises again at the beginning of his day. VIII/19

Beyond this Unmanifest there is yet another Unmanifest, that supremely Divine Substance, which does not perish even though all beings perish. VIII/20

That Unmanifest, spoken of as the indestructible, is called the Supreme Goal; that is My supreme Abode, attaining which man does not return. VIII/21

Arjuna, that Supreme Person, in whom all beings reside and by whom all this is pervaded, is attainable only by 'Ananya' devotion (that is devotion which sees the world as filled with God). VIII/22

Contrary to the popular notion, the Gita holds the Absolute, impersonal and inactive God to be only a lower, incomplete and imperfect aspect of God, which is not a fit model for all

mankind to emulate. For man cannot live by contemplation or meditation alone. Besides these, he also needs grosser, more mundane activities in order to maintain himself and society. Therefore the highest ideal for mankind is that of the Purushottama, who is a glorious combination of thought and action, feeling and energy, joy and intelligence, and who is ever giving Himself away in sacrifice for the sake of His creatures. Man reaches the highest goal by loving the Supreme Person, by seeing Him in all creatures and by living as He lives.

9

....

The Yoga of the Kingly Science and the Kingly Secret

Introductory

ACHARYA VINOBA considers this discourse to be the heart of the Gita and describes its importance in the following words: "In the Ninth Chapter is described the rare power of the name of God. This chapter is placed at the centre of the Gita, as the Gita itself is at the centre of the Mahabharata. For many reasons this chapter has been considered holy. It is said Jnana Deva in his final samadhi recited this chapter and breathed his last. At the very thought of this chapter tears come to my eyes and my heart is full...."

Sri Krishna himself has stressed the importance of this chapter in its opening verses where he says:

> To you who do not doubt I shall surely declare this, the most profound knowledge, which when followed by practical experience, shall liberate you from sin. IX/1
>
> Sovereign science, sovereign secret, supreme purifier is this; directly realisable, in accord with Dharma; and to him who practiseth it, pleasant beyond measure. IX/2

In chapter VIII the aspirant was told to practise Nitya Yoga or Satata Yoga, that is, to remain in fellowship with God at all times. Now according to popular belief, communion with God is established only during the hours of puja, prayer, meditation or other formal Sadhana. But Nitya Yoga requires man to be in touch with God even while engaged in the common works of life. How this may be accomplished is explained in this chapter.

The supreme secret revealed here is (*a*) the equivalence of worldly activities and special sadhanas as means of God-realisation and (*b*) the technique by which any work may be spiritualised, that is, transformed into a means of attaining salvation, liberation or perfection.

There is a widespread belief in Hindu society that it is impossible to reach God without long practice in special sadhanas like japa, meditation, Raja Yoga, fasts, religious ceremonies, samadhi etc. Sri Krishna has exploded this myth and emphasised that worldly activities, when performed in the correct way, will lead to perfection as well as the so-called special sadhanas; and conversely even religious sadhanas, when done in a wrong manner or for wrong objectives, will tie down a man to the earth as firmly as worldly activities incorrectly performed. (See, for example XVII/5, 6, 13, 22 and XIV/16).

The secret by which any act and the whole of one's life may be transformed into a remembrance or adoration of God, an uninterrupted Yoga, is to do whatever you do as an offering to the Lord, as a service or sacrifice to Him, for His sake and pleasure and for the good of His creatures.

God is the creator, supporter and ruler of the world; the world is His empire, His play ground, His love and His delight. Therefore it stands to reason that the maintenance and progress of the world must be His constant concern and responsibility. Therefore all work which is good or necessary for the world is God's own work and a service to Him; whoever does such work efficiently is a true servant of the Lord or an employee of His government.

The Lord being the father, mother, protector, friend and lover of all creatures, is greatly interested in their happiness and welfare and in all their efforts. Though He needs nothing for Himself and is beyond all pleasure and pain, He voluntarily

shares in the joys and sorrows of all His creatures. He views with approbation every good turn done to or by any of His creatures. He delights in every act of heroism, self-sacrifice, kindness or genius; in fact in every action that caters to the needs of His creatures or makes life brighter, better or happier for them.

As a matter of fact, God's interest in the well-being of His creatures is even deeper and closer than that of a father, mother, friend or lover. For He is seated in their hearts and constitutes every atom of their bodies. He is the life of their life and the soul of their soul. Therefore whatever sacrifice is made, whatever service is rendered, whatever good is done by any one to any one, whatever greatness is achieved by man in any sphere of work, the Supreme Lord is the ultimate beneficiary and enjoyer, as declared by Himself:

> I am verily the Enjoyer and the Lord of all sacrifices. But these men do not know Me in reality; hence they fall.
> IX/24

And the Lord adds that even the humblest of such offerings are acceptable to Him:

> Whosoever offers to Me with devotion a leaf, a flower, a fruit or water, that offering of love of the pure in heart I accept.
> IX/26

When all actions and their fruits are offered to the Lord, when the aspirant regards himself not as the owner but as the trustee or manager of whatever good things he earns as a result of his labours, his works become worship and his spiritual advancement becomes assured.

A man serves the Lord best by doing work which is necessary and useful for the world. And this work must include not only meditation on God but also concentration on scientific, economic or other problems of the world; not only offering of flowers to the deity but also cooking and scrubbing; not only prayer and puja but also teaching, healing and gymnastics. The sovereign secret revealed in this chapter does away with the distinction between sacred and secular, sadhana and worldly

works, as all good works belong to God. Gone is also the need for escaping from the world and shunning worldly activities in order to reach the Supreme. Whatever a man's vocation may be, the duties pertaining to his station in life have the power to make him a jivan mukta, to take him to God and make him one with God provided he discharges them in the proper way (IX/26-28).

What is required is not a discarding of worldly responsibilities or a change in one's profession, but the performance of all work in the proper manner and spirit. Usually a man works for his own petty self and regards the fruits of his labours as his private property. But if he works for and with God, as a servant and collaborator of God, if he regards the fruits of his labours as public property, as the property of the Divine government, if he shares generously with others whatever he earns or acquires, he transforms all his activities into a service or worship of the Lord. It is his motives that determine the spiritual value of any particular action and this applies equally whether the work is sacred or secular.

This same lesson of combining work with prayer, of doing all work as an offering to the Lord, was taught by Sri Krishna earlier when he enjoined: "Therefore at all times remember Me and fight" (VIII/7) and was repeated by him in his final summing up in the following words:

> Man reacheth perfection by each being devoted to his own duty. Listen thou how perfection is won by him who is always intent on his own duty. XVIII/45
>
> A man will reach perfection if he does his duty as an act of worship to the Lord, who is the source of all beings and fills everything. XVIII/46

God and His Creation

The relationship of God with His Creation—on which must be based any sound philosophy of life—is the constant theme of the Gita. This discourse also contains several verses on this subject, a few of which are discussed below.

> The whole world is pervaded by Me, yet My form is not

seen. All beings have root in Me, but I am not rooted in them. IX/4

Nevertheless, they do not consciously abide in Me. Such is My divine sovereignty that though I, the Supreme Self, am the cause and upholder of all, yet I remain outside. IX/5

Being beyond the reach of human intellect, God seems full of contradictions. In His absolute, impersonal aspect He is omnipresent and all-pervasive, yet He remains hidden from us. All beings live in Him; He is their life and support, but no one is aware of this and no one tries to live in fellowship with Him. In His relative aspect the entire universe is a concrete manifestation of God; yet people regard themselves as entirely apart from God and from one another. Though all creatures are unified in His body, they act as if one can only flourish at the expense of others. Creatures cannot exist without God, but His own existence in no way depends on their existence.

As the mighty wind, though moving everywhere, has no resting place but space, so have all these beings no home but Me. IX/6

God and ether are both all pervasive, elusive and imperceptible. Just as ether is not contaminated by the dust and dirt of the air, so God remains unaffected by any thing happening in His creation.

I the oblation; I the sacrifice; I the ancestral offering; I the fire-giving herb; the mantrum I; I also the butter; I the fire; I am verily the act of offering. IX/16

The Lord is present in every deed which promotes the common weal. He is also present in every part of such a good deed. All good deeds are, therefore, holy. As a matter of fact God is present in all actions whether good or bad. But by identifying himself only with the former Sri Krishna has called upon all mankind to undertake work for general good and he also assures that the doer of good never comes to grief. (VI/40)

I am the father of this universe and its mother; I am its nourisher and grandsire; I am the holy one to be known, the word of power Om, and also the sacred scriptures. IX/17

I am the goal, the supporter, the Lord, the witness, the abode, the shelter, the friend, the origin, the dissolution, the treasure house and the seed imperishable. IX/18

I give heat, I withhold and send forth the rain; I am immortality and death; I am being as well as non-being, O Arjuna. IX/19

These verses give further examples to drive home the lesson that God is everything and in everything. He is present in all matter, in all energy, in all life, in all activity and in all consciousness. He is the origin of all names and forms. All names are His names, all forms are His forms. In particular, His love for His creatures is that of father, mother, supporter, friend and lover—all rolled in one.

Non-attachment

Though God mingles in action ceaselessly and untiringly (III/22-24). He is not bound or tainted by His works, because He is not attached to them or to their fruits but does His work for the good of His creatures and not with any personal or self-ful motive of His own. Sri Krishna says:

> Nor do these works bind Me, O Dhananjaya, sitting like one unconcerned, unattached to actions. IX/9

The aspirant is required to act in the same spirit. Tireless work without attachment to the fruit is the central lesson of the Gita. This subject has already been discussed in detail in the third chapter.

God in Human Form

> Fools disregard Me when clad in human form, not knowing My higher nature as the great Lord of beings: IX/11

> Empty of hope, empty of deeds, empty of wisdom, senseless, partaking of the deceitful, brutal and demoniacal nature. IX/12

God is all; everything has evolved from Him. Putting on innumerable forms as human beings, it is He who lives and moves in the world. But foolish people, believing that God is entirely apart from this world and resident in some lofty and distant heaven, do not recognise the Lord seated in the hearts of their fellow men, and therefore treat their brethren with indifference or contempt or in a cruel, deceitful and demoniacal manner.

Commenting on these verses Radhakrishnan writes: "We see only the outward human body and not the Divine in it. We see the outer appearance, not the inner reality. To recognise God in His earthly disguise means effort.... In the Bhagavata the Lord is represented as saying, 'I am present in all beings as their soul but ignoring My presence the mortal makes a display of image worship'."

Satavalekar explains: "The members of societies who do not believe that God is present in all beings, who, on the contrary, believe that all individuals are separate from one another, that God resides in some far off place and not in every man and woman, it is such people who try to rob one another, who indulge in corrupt and cruel practices. Such people are governed by demoniacal tendencies."

> But the mahatmas, O Partha, partaking of My divine nature, worship with unwavering mind, having known Me the imperishable source of beings. IX/13
> Always glorifying Me, striving, firm in vows, prostrating themselves before Me, they worship Me with devotion, ever harmonised. IX/14

As pointed out by Satavalekar, Dr. Radhakrishnan and several other authorities, the meaning of Bhakti is "to serve, to honour, to give in charity and to perform one's duty with devotion. The high souled ones who practise devotion to God do all these things." As regards the forms of God which are fit to be served, Satavalekar explains that according to the

Rig Veda Brahmanas constitute the head of the Universal Supreme Person; the Kshatriyas are His arms; the Vaishyas His abdomen and the Sudras His feet. Thus God is always ready to receive our service in the form of these four Varnas, which include the whole of mankind. God himself is always present before us in flesh and blood in the form of humanity. Therefore the service of mankind, service of society, service of one's country or nation, are all service of God.

> To those men who worship Me with undivided mind, thinking of no other, who are ever established in Yoga, I bring full security. IX/22

This verse is an assurance to the aspirant that as he becomes more and more devoted to the Almighty, as he cares less and less for his own petty self and more and more for the Supreme Self personified in the form of His creatures, as he gives away more and more of the fruits of his labours to those who need them, God takes upon himself increasingly the responsibility of looking after his welfare, both material and spiritual. It is but natural that a benevolent master would watch the interests of the servant who forgets himself in the service of the master.

> The same am I to all beings; there is none hateful to Me nor dear. But those who worship Me with devotion, they are in Me and I also in them. IX/29

In the words of Swami Vivekananda, there is a cloud shedding its rain on all fields alike. But it is only the field that is well cultivated which gets the advantage of the shower; another field which has not been tilled or taken care of, cannot get that advantage. It is not the fault of the cloud. The mercy of God is eternal and unchangeable; it is we that make the differentiation.

The blessings of God are open to all. But in order to take advantage of them man must exert himself and cooperate with God. Arjuna, the archer, has to do the fighting, but he can make God a partner in the undertaking—his friend, philosopher and guide in the business of living.

The Royal Secret

Now we come to the key stanzas of this chapter—some of the best and most important in the Gita—which contain the essence of Sri Krishna's teaching:

> Whosoever offers to Me with devotion a leaf, a flower, a fruit or water, that offering of love of the pure in heart I accept. IX/26

The commonest and humblest of offerings are acceptable to God. The mite of a poor man is as acceptable to Him as the million of a multimillionaire.

But how are these material things to be offered to the Lord?

It is customary to offer leaves, flowers, fruit and water to the deity in the puja or ceremonial worship conducted in homes and temples. Therefore many people believe that the correct and only way to offer material things to God is to place them before an image or photograph of the Lord. Such puja undoubtedly helps many people in their spiritual advancement. But considering that Sri Krishna has repeatedly stressed throughout the Gita that God is seated in the hearts of all creatures, it is obviously his intention that the offering should be made to the sentient God present in living beings rather than to the inert God in an image or idol. In fact, Sri Krishna has left no room for doubt on this point, for he has said earlier:

> He who established in unity worshippeth Me abiding in all beings, that yogi liveth in Me, even though engaged in all kinds of activities. VI/31

Gandhiji hit the nail on the head when he commented: "It is the Lord in every being whom we serve with devotion who accepts the service." When God present in the poor, the hungry and the distressed is crying for our help, love and sympathy, why should we limit our offerings to the deity we have kept confined in our puja room or temple who needs nothing and partakes of nothing?

Explaining verse 26 Satavalekar writes: "If all creatures are embodiments of God, then to offer fruit or water to a living

being amounts to offering it to the Lord Himself. To give water to the thirsty, food to the hungry, flowers to the learned, means a direct offering to God. Likewise if water or grass is given to a cow or other animal, it is in effect an offering made to God."

True worship of the Lord consists in seeing God in others and in helping them to live a fuller, better and happier life.

Sri Krishna himself has clarified these points in the next verse, when he says:

> Whatsoever thou doest, whatsoever thou eatest, whatsoever thou givest, whatsoever thou doest of austerity, O Kaunteya, do thou that as an offering unto Me. IX/27

While the 26th verse refers to offerings of material things, verse 27 requires all actions to be offered to the Lord.

How to offer Actions to God?

Actions, unlike flowers and leaves, cannot be offered to an idol or image. Therefore there must be some other technique of offering one's works to God. Necessarily, it has to be a mental process. With a little reflection two ways suggest themselves for accomplishing this:

(1) Offer your works directly to the Lord residing in the hearts of all creatures. In all your dealings with your father, mother, wife, son, employer, employees, client, customer, patient or other person, have the mental attitude or feeling that you are serving not only their outer forms but also their inner reality—namely the Lord who is the very soul of their souls.

(2) Alternatively, you may have the feeling that all the work of the world is God's own work and you are merely His employee or agent. Whatever work you do in your domestic, social, professional or spiritual life, do it as a duty laid on you by the Supreme Ruler of the world. You work on His behalf and the fruits of your labours really belong not to you but to Him.

The first method requires you to have the feeling, at the back of your mind, that all your dealings are with God Himself appearing in the garb of human beings or other creatures. If you give alms to a poor man consider that you have given it

to God Himself. If you do a good turn to some one, believe that you have served none but the Lord. God is not only present in all good deeds (IX/16) but He actually receives and enjoys their fruits (IX/24 and XIII/22). Though He needs nothing, it is really He who is served and benefited whenever you engage in any useful activity; and it is He who is hurt whenever you do the contrary or fail in your duty. This is how an offering may be made to God through the medium of His creation. This is one way of linking your works with God.

Elucidating this method of sanctifying all works, Satavalekar writes: "Everyone will believe that he is serving the Lord by doing his work. A doctor will treat a patient with the feeling that 'God has come to me in the form of this patient; it is my duty to serve him.' A judge will believe that it is God who has come to him for impartial justice in the form of the parties standing before him. A wife would say: 'By my wifehood I would serve the Lord in the form of my husband,' and the husband would say, 'It is God who has come to me as my companion in the form of my wife and therefore it is my duty to serve Him and make Him happy by carrying out my duties as a husband.' Likewise a soldier on the field of battle would think, 'It is God who is standing before me in the form of these opponents; so it is my bounden duty to serve Him by fighting bravely'."

Many people look upon God as the Ruler of the world sitting on high, rather than as the Lord residing in the heart of each and every creature. If you belong to this category, regard yourself as a humble servant of the Lord and all your work as the duty assigned to you by Him. Cultivate the feeling that whatever you are doing is God's work, that all the time you are acting on His behalf and by the powers delegated to you by Him. You will try to do everything as well as you can in order to win the approval of the Lord, just as you would do in the case of an earthly master. When you regard yourself as a servant of the Lord and the fruits of your labours as His property and when you share those fruits liberally with others, then all your work—in fact your entire life—becomes an offering to God. This is another way of spiritualising all your activities.

You may adopt any method you like for dedicating your works to God, but the crux of the whole matter is that your

activities, instead of being self-centred, become other-centred and self-seeking is replaced with self-giving. The range of your interests is widened gradually from self and family to society, your country and the whole world. You work not for your own pleasure but that of your Master, according to His instructions and standards and for the good of His creatures. You realise that not only your works but even their fruits belong to God; you are only the collector and custodian of all goods and not their owner.

This simple change in the attitude to work and in the motives and mode of working revolutionises your entire life. It sanctifies all your thoughts, feelings and actions. It turns your whole being towards God. For when you decide to offer any work to the Almighty, you will take good care to see that it is intrinsically worthy or at least harmless, and is done to a perfect finish, that the performance is, in short, the very best you are capable of. You would not think of offering Him acts which are mean or petty, crooked or cruel, dishonest or corrupt or those done in a careless, slipshod manner, any more than you would offer Him rotten fruit or dirty water. And even the actions and things which are good and pure will be offered to Him in a selfless spirit as far as possible and not for self-ful ends. In the words of Acharya Vinoba, if you strengthen the bhavana that all actions should be offered up to the Lord, this sordid life will become divine, the commonplace will become beautiful.

It is necessary to emphasise that according to verse 27 all actions, however humble, should be done as an offering to the Lord. So long as his works are done in the proper spirit, it does not matter whether the aspirant is a tailor or a barber, a doctor or a teacher. It is not only certain special kinds of works, like religious ceremonies, austerities and japa, that can lift you towards God. The same purpose can be served by the ordinary acts of your private or professional life provided they are done as a sacrifice or in the service of God. Even the act of taking one's food may be done as an offering to God: for when one eats, it is actually the Lord seated in one's heart who really eats and digests the food (XV/14). Moreover, eating is a sacrifice necessary to keep one-self in a state of fitness, mentally as well as physically, for the service of the Lord.

Finally, to facilitate union with God, verse 27 requires all of

one's actions to be done as an offering to Him. As long as only some actions are dedicated to God and the others to one's own petty self, the man will remain imperfect and aloof from God.

Sri Krishna's teaching contained in verses 26 and 27 is remarkable for its universality, catholicity and simplicity. Difficult sadhanas, elaborate rituals and special sacrificial material are no longer compulsory. Instead, the way is shown how the whole of life can be made a sacrament by offering all actions as a sacrifice or service to the Lord. This kind of yoga is the best of purifiers and yet very easy to practise; nor does it require life to be divested of all enjoyments, for says the Lord:

> Sovereign science, sovereign secret, supreme purifier is that; directly realisable, in accord with Dharma; and to him who practiseth it, pleasant beyond measure. IX/2

And the Lord has assured that the highest goal of life will be reached by him who dedicates all his works and their fruit to Him—who, in other words, practises the supreme yoga taught in this discourse. For says Sri Krishna:

> Thus shalt thou be liberated from the bonds of action yielding good and evil fruits; thyself united (to God) through the Yoga of renunciation (that is by dedicating all actions and their fruits to God), thou shalt be set free and come to Me. IX/28

Other Views

To bring home the vital lessons taught in verses 26 and 27 the views of Brother Lawrence, Sri Aurobindo, Vinobaji and Basil King are given here.

Brother Lawrence was a well-known devotee of God who lived in France. Though suffering from physical disabilities, he served as a cook for many years. His views, as recorded by one of his friends in the book *The Practice of the Presence of God*, are quoted below. They provide a striking confirmation of what was taught by Sri Krishna centuries ago.

"That he (Brother Lawrence) said to God it was His busi-

ness he was about, and that he afterwards found it very well performed."

* * *

"That in his trouble of mind he had consulted nobody, but knowing only by the light of faith that God was present, he contented himself with devoting all his actions to Him, that is doing them with a desire to please Him, let what would come of it."

* * *

"That our bodily mortifications and other exercises are useless except as they serve to arrive at the union with God by love; that he had well considered this and found it the shortest way to go straight to Him by a continual exercise of love and doing all things for His sake."

"That our sanctification does not depend upon changing our works, but on doing that for God's sake which we commonly do for our own".

"That the most excellent method he had found of going to God was that of doing our common business without any view of pleasing men, and (as far as we are capable) purely for the love of God."

* * *

"That he was more united to God in his outward employments than when he left them for devotion and retirement."

"That it was a great delusion to think that the time of prayer ought to differ from other times; that we are as strictly obliged to adhere to God by action in the time of action as by prayer in the season of prayer."

"The time of business, said he, does not with me differ from the time of prayer; and in noise and chatter of my kitchen, while several persons are at the same time calling for different things, I possess God in as great tranquillity as if I were upon my knees at the blessed sacrament."

Sri Aurobindo says: "The whole action of the world is the

business of the Lord of the universe.... The fruits are his, the results are those determined by him and our personal action is only a minor contribution.... To work impersonally, desirelessly and without attachment to the fruits of our work, for the sake of God and the world and the greater self and the fulfilment of the universal will—this is the first step towards liberation and perfection".

Acharya Vinoba explains: "The moksha that lay locked up in the Vedas as in a strong box, the Lord has brought out and placed at the crossroad, 'What a direct and easy way to Moksha.' One's ordinary life, what one does as Swadharma, one's acts of service, why not make this itself a Yajna, sacrifice? Where is the need for any other sacrifice, any Yagas or Yajnas? Regard as Yajna, and continue to perform the ordinary work of service that you do every day. This is the royal road".

* * *

"Does the Lord hide Himself somewhere, in some cave or crevice, in some river or in some heaven? Diamonds and rubies, gold and silver lie hidden in the bowels of the earth, pearls, corals in the depth of the sea. But is this gem, the Lord, hidden some where? Have we to dig Him up? He stands all the time before all of us. Every one here is a manifestation of the Lord. The Lord says, 'Do not dishonour the person of the Lord manifest in human form, my brother.' It is the Lord that appears as all things moving and unmoving. Where is the need for artificial aids to find Him? The way is straight and easy. Relate to the Lord whatever service you perform; that is enough. Become Rama's servant.... Do just this much. Whatever you do, dedicate it to the Lord. Relate to Him every act of yours. This is what the Ninth Chapter teaches. Hence it is most dear to Bhaktas."

In his book *The Conquest of Fear* Basil King writes: "Oh, to be simple!—to be natural! to be spontaneous! to be free from the concept of a God shut up within the four walls of a building and whose chief interests are the sermon and the number of parishioners! The Kingdom of God is the Universal Kingdom, including every one and every thing—all interests, all commerce, all government, all invention, all art, all amusement,

all the staid pursuits of the old and all the ardour of the young, all sport, all laughter, all that makes for gladness. It is the Kingdom of the bird and the flower and the horse and the motor car and the motion picture house and the office and the theatre and the ball room and the school and the college and everything else that man has evolved for himself. He has evolved these things wrongly because nine times out of ten he has seen them as outside God's Kingdom, instead of being God's own undertakings, because they are ours. All that we have to do to seek His Kingdom is to do what we are doing every day, with energy and fun, but to do it knowing we are His agents and co-workers...."

* * *

"But in working for the Master of the Universe I am working for One to whom I am essential. My job could not be 'swung' by any one else, since every one else is essential to the 'swinging' of his own. I am not taken on to do what any one else could do as well; I am positively needed for this thing and for no other thing.

"The nature of 'this thing' for which I am needed may be seen in the obvious duties of my situation as regards my family, my employers and my surroundings, which sum up my responsibilities towards man in general. No explanation of myself can be independent of men in general, since my work is for them in its final aim. If I forget them I forget God, God expressing Himself to me through men in general, and through my family and my employers in particular.

"Incidentally I work for men, but essentially and consciously I work for God, and look to God for my recompense.

"Now God is the most generous of pay masters. It is natural enough that he should be so. He who delights in the grace of a bird or the colour of a flower must delight in a man in proportion to man's higher place in the creative scale. As our Lord points out, that is no more than common sense. And delighting in us as He does, God could not possibly stint us in what we earn from Him. Merely to suppose so is to dishonour Him. A large part of His joy must be in our joy."

It is clear that men of God and thinkers even in the West

accept the same way of life and the same art of working as was taught in the Gita thousands of years ago.

Summing Up

> Fix your mind on Me; be devoted to Me; sacrifice to Me; make obeisance to Me. Having thus united yourself to Me and taking Me as the supreme goal, you shall come to Me. IX/34

In this verse Sri Krishna sums up all that he has said before. The great importance of this stanza will be seen from the fact that the same verse (with a minor variation) is used to sum up the completed teaching of the Gita at the end of the last chapter:

> Fix your mind on Me; be devoted to Me, sacrifice to Me, make obeisance to Me, so shall you come to Me. This is My pledge to you, for you are dear to Me. XVIII/65

As it is one of the most famous verses in the Gita, it is necessary to understand its meaning thoroughly.

Manmana bhava: Be My-minded. Dedicate your heart and soul to Me. Let all your thoughts and feelings and the whole of your life turn towards Me. Let every thing you see, every incident in life, every one you meet, every sound you hear, every thing you touch or eat, remind you of Me and My glory. Let all your actions be done for My pleasure and satisfaction.

Mad bhaktah: Be My devotee. Love Me, honour Me, serve Me. Cultivate gratitude for Me by thinking of the innumerable blessings I have conferred on you from time to time as your Supreme Father, Mother and Friend. Remember that your happiness, your wealth and power, your accomplishments and good deeds, in fact your life itself, all come from Me. Try to return My love by working for causes which are dear to Me and by participating in activities in which I am myself incessantly engaged.

Madyaji: Sacrifice to Me. Do all your works for My sake, as a sacrifice, offering or service to Me. Regard yourself as an employee of My Kingdom on earth. Devote every ounce of

your energy, all your knowledge, wealth and influence to tasks that promote the good of My concrete forms, that is, your family, your employers and employees, your society, your country and the world.

Mam namaskuru: Offer obeisance to Me. In your dealings with others remember the Lord who is in them. "Knowing that the entire universe is filled with Sita and Ram and is their form and manifestation", says Tulsidas, "I bow to all with folded hands."

In short, Sri Krishna has taught that the entire body and soul of man, his intellect, emotions and will, all his time and energy should be devoted to the remembrance, love and service of the Lord. This is the complete and constant yoga, the Nitya Yoga, which the Gita has placed as the ideal before mankind. And he who unites himself with the Supreme Person in these various ways and regards Him as the goal of his life, undoubtedly attains God.

10

....

Vibhuti Yoga
or
The Yoga of
Divine Manifestations

Introductory

LIKE YOGA AND YAJNA, Vibhuti is another word whose meaning has undergone a transformation at the hands of Sri Krishna. The word Vibhuti occurs in Patanjali's *Yoga Darshan*, where it has been used to indicate supernatural powers (like making oneself invisible or reading the thoughts of others) acquired through the practice of Yoga. In the Gita the word Vibhuti is not restricted to supernatural powers but extended in its scope so as to include any uncommon expression of wisdom, goodness or other qualities or superexcellence in any field of endeavour. Any person or object in whom a quality is expressed in a superlative degree is also called a Vibhuti or special manifestation of God. Thus the attainment of Vibhuti or divine glory, which was thought to be the exclusive preserve of Yogis, has been enjoined upon all and sundry by Sri Krishna. This is the special lesson taught in this discourse.

In previous chapters Arjuna was advised to worship the Lord abiding in all beings (VI/31), to remember God at all times (VIII/7), to be fixed in yoga at all times (VIII/27) and to do all works as an offering to the Lord (IX/27). In this chapter Sri Krishna develops the theme and suggests ways of translating these instructions into action. By emphasising that all creatures are God's own manifestations, Sri Krishna, the Supreme Lord, has brought himself within reach of man. As God is infinite, absolute and impersonal, it would be impossible to attain Him but for His numerous manifestations who deputise for Him and gladly receive man's offering of love, service, attention and adoration on His behalf. This is another great lesson of Vibhuti Yoga and in regard to its importance Sri Krishna says:

> He who knows this Vibhuti and Yoga of Mine in reality gets established in Me through unwavering Yoga; of this there is no doubt. X/7

And this is no exaggeration—for unwavering yoga is nothing but seeing and adoring the Lord in all His manifestations, everywhere and at all times. Precisely the same thought was expressed earlier in different words:

> He who established in unity worshippeth Me abiding in all beings, that yogi liveth in Me whatever his mode of living. VI/31

In brief the main teachings of this chapter are:

(1) God has projected the entire universe out of Himself. He is seated in the hearts of all creatures and everything living or non-living is His partial manifestation. Therefore He can be conveniently approached, worshipped or served by making use of any of the innumerable forms in which he appears in flesh and blood in our daily lives.

(2) Though Sri Krishna is all and in all, He has emphatically asserted his identity with the most outstanding or pre-eminent individual of each class of beings. By implication he has dissociated himself from all others whose attainments are below average or just average. In this way he has preached the gospel

of greatness or superexcellence to all mankind.

(3) By identifying Himself with intelligence, power, fame, prosperity, speech, statesmanship etc., Sri Krishna has glorified all such qualities and acquisitions as well as the activities and persons in whom they are found in remarkable degrees. These qualities may appear to be worldly and not worthwhile for a seeker of God but Sri Krishna has disapproved of this wrong notion in the strongest terms. Thus he has exhorted every one to cultivate these qualities to the utmost in order to make the world a better and happier place to live in.

The World as a Projection of God

Since God is infinite, formless and beyond human comprehension, and since according to popular belief He resides in some far off heaven, the disciple may wonder how he can get at Him in order to offer Him his gifts, sacrifices or salutations. As if to voice this doubt Arjuna enquires from Sri Krishna the practical ways by which mere mortals may know the Supreme Lord and more specifically the various aspects in which they may preferably think of Him:

> Deign to tell without reserve of Thine own divine glories, by which glories Thou remainest pervading these worlds. X/16
>
> How may I know Thee, O Yogi, by constant meditation? In what, in what aspects art Thou to be thought of by me, O Blessed Lord? X/17

Elucidating these points Sri Krishna says:

> I am the origin of all; from Me all things evolve. The wise know this and adore Me with all their heart. X/8
>
> I, O Gudakesha, am the self seated in the hearts of all creatures. I am the beginning, the middle and the very end of beings. X/20
>
> Of created things I am the beginning and the end as also the middle, O Arjuna. Of sciences, the science concerning the self; the speech of orators I. X/32
>
> And whatever is the seed of all beings that am I, O Arjuna.

There is no being, whether moving or unmoving that can exist without Me. X/39

Everything has evolved from God even as the root, trunk, branches, leaves, flower and fruit and the entire tree come out of the seed or as the cob-web comes out of the spider. God is not only seated in the hearts of all creatures but also constitutes every particle of their bodies from beginning to end. The whole of creation is the gross manifestation of God, that is to say, the physical body of the Supreme Spirit. The entire work of the world is God's own business. Normally he does not do this work directly but through the agency of His manifestations. For all practical purposes they deputise for Him; through them he rules the world; through them He comes into our lives and through them we can conveniently approach and realise Him. The worship or service intended for Him may be offered vicariously to His appropriate manifestations. Many persons and objects that touch one's life can serve this purpose admirably.

It is impossible to know or see God in His entirety as He is infinite, eternal, formless. But the wise are not beaten by this difficulty because—says Sri Krishna in the eighth verse—they know that God has made Himself accessible to us in the form of the creation. We cannot know God except through His own self-expressions. Though they give only partial and imperfect glimpses of Him, the way to God is undoubtedly through them and with their help.

Glorious Manifestations of God

If in one aspect God is absolute, perfect, actionless and unmanifest, in another He is ever active and revealed everywhere. He himself appears in the form of stone and flower, bird and beast and man, life and consciousness, colour and song, love and wisdom, movement and activity, rich as well as poor. All beings and things, all qualities and emotions, all inventions and works of art express and declare God's power and glory. Though God pervades all things, His light and power are expressed more in a plant than in a stone; more in an animal than in a plant; more in a man than in the lower animals; and more in a Gandhi, Vivekananda, Shivaji or Rabindranath than in the average person. Because man cannot attain God except by

gradual steps, it is necessary to have an idea of the things in which God's glory may be most readily seen.

Sri Krishna had mentioned a few of His glories in chapter VII (stanzas 6 to 12), reverted to the subject in chapter IX (verses 16 to 19) and again in the present chapter (verses 4 to 6 and 8). As Arjuna's interest in the topic was thereby aroused, he requested Sri Krishna vide stanzas 16 to 18 of the present chapter, to give him a fuller account of His principal glories on which he could meditate with profit.

Thereupon Sri Krishna mentioned to Arjuna, by way of illustration, some of his principal glories, or pre-eminent manifestations. Some of the verses are given below:

> Of the Vedas I am the Sama Veda; I am Vasava among the gods; of the senses, I am the mind and among living beings, I am consciousness. X/22
>
> Of the great Rishis I am Bhrigu; of utterances I am the monosyllable Om. Of Yajnas I am Japa Yajna and of immovable things the Himalaya. X/25

Explaining this verse Swami Chidbhavananda writes: "Yajna is the act of the Jivatman making himself over to the Paramatman. The easiest and the most potent of all Yajnas is the Japa Yajna. It can be performed at any time and in the midst of any other activity. It involves no harm or hindrance to any body. The Lord is present where Japa Yajna takes place."

No one could speak with greater authority about japa yajna than Gandhiji, its life long votary. He wrote: "Each repetition of God's name carries you nearer and nearer to God. This is a concrete fact, and I may tell you that I am talking here as no theorist but as one who has experienced what he says every minute of his life, so much so that it is easier for the life to stop than for this incessant process to stop. It is a definite need of the soul".

> Of purifiers I am the wind, Rama of warriors I; I am makara of fishes; of streams the Ganga am I. X/31
>
> Of rulers I am the sceptre; of those that seek victory I am statemanship; and of secrets I am also silence; the knowledge of knowers am I. X/38

The Yoga of Greatness

Vibhuti Yoga may also be called the Yoga of greatness in life or the gospel of superexcellence.

In this discourse Sri Krishna recounts a number of pre-eminent models for mankind to emulate. In a few short, forthright sentences He has identified Himself with the most distinguished figures in several well known classes of beings. Thereby He has commended the celebrities in all walks of life but not those who are only average or mediocre. His power and splendour shine out in the former but not in the latter. He has extolled pre-eminence and superexcellence wherever they may be found. In this way He has called upon every one to strive for superior or exceptional ability in his own field.

In effect He says: "Among warriors I am Rama, among sages Vyasa; among rivers the Ganga; among cows Kamadhenu; among men the King. Likewise should you endeavour to make yourself a distinguished and honoured member of your own social or professional group. Don't be content to remain just an ordinary person. Awaken your dormant powers. Develop your knowledge, ability and usefulness to the utmost. So will you bring out the divinity hidden in you and make yourself a higher manifestation of God's glory, a nobler employee of His Government, more like Him and more worthy of His grace."

Endless are the glorious manifestations of God. After citing a few concrete examples Sri Krishna sums up the generalised principle of Vibhuti Yoga in the following words:

> Whatsoever being is glorious, good, prosperous or powerful, understand thou that to go forth from a fragment of My Splendour. X/41

Radhakrishnan comments: "While all things are supported by God, things of beauty and splendour reveal Him more than others. Every deed of heroism, every life of sacrifice, every work of genius, is a revelation of the Divine. The epic moments of a man's life are inexplicably beyond the finite mind of man".

This verse gives the criteria for *Vibhutiship.* So long as these conditions are fulfilled, Vibhutis may be found in any country, among human, animals or birds.

Vibhutis are not limited to any time or place, religion or occupation. But where there is no attractiveness, beauty, influence, where there is poverty, ugliness or weakness, there is no Vibhuti.

Arjuna wanted to know the principal manifestations of God in order to meditate or reflect on them. And one major object of meditation is to assimilate the qualities of the person meditated upon—to grow into his likeness. Therefore one very important part of Vibhuti Yoga is to refine your character and develop your faculties and proficiency in order to make yourself a better expression of the Divine. It is not good enough to admire or respect the Vibhutis around you. You should also try to become one yourself. The purpose of life is to make yourself perfect, not merely to see the perfection in others; to become an image of God and not merely to have a vision of Him in your own heart or elsewhere.

The ideal of all round excellence is very difficult to attain. Only rare souls can become versatile geniuses. But every one can acquire mastery in some little branch of knowledge or skill. Every one can do at least select phases of his work superlatively well. And once this is done, superiority in one part of his life will act as the incentive, the nucleus and gathering point for superiority in other directions. Little by little a man can add to his accomplishments; step by step he can climb to the greatest heights.

It is noteworthy that one who is a Vibhuti in one field is not necessarily so in others. But whatever be your vocation, do not be content to remain a mediocre. From the commonplace lift yourself to the level of the superb. And how may this be done? Put your heart and soul in your work; do it as best as you can. Develop your strong point, selecting for specialisation the branch of knowledge or activity for which you have special aptitude and which you find most interesting or easiest for you. Strive for mastery in your chosen field and do not rest until you have reached the top and won honour and distinction for yourself.

This message of Vibhuti Yoga, which is given in this discourse through figurative language and indirect suggestions, is repeated in direct and forceful terms, by the cosmic form of the Lord, when He says:

Therefore, stand up! Win for thyself renown, Conquer thy foes, enjoy the wealth-filled realm. XI/33

Every one must pursue this Yoga of excellence with the dual purpose of developing himself to the utmost and serving the Lord to the best of his ability. By performing his duty superbly well, a man attains not only divine glory but also spiritual perfection. (XVIII/45).

Yoga requires a man to do his work, whatever it may be, with skill, as explained in verse 50 of the second chapter. Vibhuti Yoga goes further and asks the aspirant not to be satisfied with the acquisition of ordinary or average skill but to seek heights of efficiency or horizons of knowledge never reached before.

If, as advised in chapter IX, the disciple performs all his tasks as a servant or instrument of God, for His pleasure, or as an offering to Him, will he be content to let his performance be just ordinary or commonplace? Will he not like his work-offering to be the very best he is capable of producing? Would he not be eager to infuse some excellence, originality, and distinctiveness into it in order to please the Lord?

The same lesson of superexcellence has been taught by an English poet who sang:

If you can't be a pine on the top of the hill,
Be a scrub in the valley—but be
The best little scrub by the side of the rill;
Be a bush if you can't be a tree.
If you can't be a bush, be a bit of grass,
And some highway happier make;
If you can't be a muskie, then just be a bass—
But be the liveliest bass in the lake!
If you can't be a highway, then just be a trail,
If you can't be the Sun, be a star;
It isn't in size that you win or you fail,
BE THE BEST OF WHATEVER YOU ARE.

Another old song says:

If I were a cobbler, it would be my pride

The best of all cobblers to be;
If I were a tinker, no tinker beside
Should mend an old kettle like me.

"If a man can write a better book", said Emerson, "preach a better sermon, or make a better mouse-trap than his neighbour, though he build his house in the woods, the world will make a beaten path to his door".

It will be noticed that Vibhutis are not limited to those who renounce the world or devote themselves exclusively to religious or metaphysical pursuits, but are also found among those engaged in mundane activities, among the lower forms of life like trees, cows and wild animals and even among inanimate objects like mountains and rivers:

Among the Yakshas and Rakshasas I am the god of wealth. X/23
Among generals I am Skanda X/24
Among the celestial songsters I am Chitraratha. X/26
Among men I am the King. X/27
Among rulers I am Yama. X/29
Among warriors I am Rama. X/31
Among women I am the goddess presiding over fame, prosperity, speech, memory, intelligence, steadfastness and forgiveness. X/34
I am the glory of the glorious, and victory of the victorious. X/36
Among Pandavas I am Arjuna. X/37
Of rulers I am the sceptre; of those who seek victory I am statesmanship. I am the knowledge of knowers. X/38

Greatness in a worldly field qualifies a man for *Vibhutiship* no less than greatness in a purely spiritual field. Whether you are soldier or a statesman, an industrialist or a scientist, so long as you attain pre-eminence in your profession, you are eligible to be classed as a Vibhuti. Any one can transform himself into a superior manifestation of divine glory if he does his work superbly well, if he extends the frontiers of knowledge, or organises movements to promote the happiness or wellbeing of mankind.

All the work of the world is God's own. If philosophy, Raja Yoga and Sadhana are departments of His government, so too are science and technology, art and literature, medicine and hygiene, industry and administration—being all essential for the maintenance of the world.

Worldly excellence is no less acceptable to God than spiritual excellence. Both are, in fact, one, according to Vedanta, *Vidya* and *A-Vidya* are both necessary for the maintenance and advance of the world.

In fact, the whole aim of life is the pursuit of greatness so that man will express more and more of God's greatness in himself and live a richer, fuller life by rising from poverty to plenty, from weakness to strength, from disease to health, from dullness to intelligence, from ignorance to knowledge, from wickedness to nobility. And this greatness must have as many facets as life itself. It must include not only religion, philosophy and asceticism but also art and literature, science and technology, administration and defence; not only the conquest of inner nature but also of outer nature; not only the quest of God in heaven but also of God in the world.

God in Daily Life

The manifestations of God may be broadly divided into three categories — the outstanding, the commonplace and the subnormal. The first, by reason of their impressiveness, naturally arrest attention and therefore readily remind man of the might and glory of their author. Even a novice can feel some supernatural power acting through them.

But if the pre-eminent manifestations of God have the merit of prominence, they are generally remote, solemn and mysterious. They rarely arouse any emotion in the average person or touch his life in an intimate fashion. Therefore their utility as aids to union with God is limited. In any case it is not sufficient to see God only in His outstanding manifestations, very useful as they are as starting points. One must also learn to see Him in His common forms all around.

You need not go anywhere in search of the manifestations of God. Even your body, which is always with you, is one of His most wonderful manifestations. With a little reflection you will

see that it is God's power acting in you that digests the food you take and turns in into blood and energy; makes your heart throb rhythmically; enables your eyes to see, ears to hear, tongue to taste and talk! God is the soul of your soul, the power behind all your thoughts, feelings, words and actions. Silent and invisible, He is with you and in you all the time. not inert but lively and active. With Dadu you can sing: "Thou art my tongue, my voice, my ears and my eyes. Thou art my body from head to foot. Thou art my life-breath. Thou art the life of my life. Thou art my innermost self. Thou art my all in all."

If you ponder how the Master Engineer is always working within you, you can easily get glimpses of His omnipresence and omnipotence.

Next the aspirant can also find the manifestations of God in his own little world of family, friends and fellow workers. This is an important step in the technique of Vibhuti Yoga, to look out for the Vibhutis—the wise, the good, the brave, the useful—in one's own group or society, people with whom one may come in touch directly and who are in many respects like oneself.

If the glory of God blazons forth in the mighty sun, can it not be more readily seen in the tiny lamp that illumines our home every night? A lamp may be a mere speck compared with the sun, but has it not the advantage of being more handy, more homely, more personal? The glimmer of a lamp can remind us of the glory of God and not merely the dazzling light of the stupendous sun.

If certain pre-eminent beings are fit to be classed as vibhutis for the whole world, there are others, perhaps not so great, who hold a similar position in respect of their country, and still others who though not necessarily great or eminent in the absolute sense, nevertheless occupy an important position in their own little group. Vibhutis of the latter type may be quite insignificant in the eyes of the world, but they have a special status among those they serve or benefit. Thus every home, office, factory and institution has its own Vibhutis, namely those who occupy positions of influence and authority. Each individual has his own set of Vibhutis—his parents, teachers, friends and others who look after him, mould his

character, promote his interests or make his life smoother and pleasanter. Such persons and things are not the chains that bind a man down to the earth as some believe, but chains by which he may raise himself to heaven. For if he maintains a correct and sensible attitude of love free from attachment, he will soon realise how much he owes them and how even spiritual Sadhanas cannot be practised without their loving care and support. Far from being obstacles they are indispensable for his progress. Can there be gentler, nobler or sweeter expressions of God, so far as you are concerned, than your parents, teachers, friends, wife and children, and even domestic servants, who give you love or kindness, help, advice or encouragement and sacrifice their own comfort for your sake? They are the channels through which God's love and grace and gifts flow down to you day in and day out. If you see in them God ever at work for your good, if you acknowledge their debt, if you cultivate an attitude of gratitude towards them, if you take practical steps to return their love and kindness, you will eventualy be offering worship to God, you will draw closer to Him.

God in Good Qualities

While endeavouring to see the glory of God in His pre-eminent manifestations and in those who are kind and helpful to you, you should also try to get glimpses of the splendour of God even among people and things not directly concerned with you.

A necessary step in Vibhuti Yoga is to train yourself to see the good in others. A worldly wise man has a sharp eye for the faults and weaknesses of fellow men. Prudence requires him to beware of them; sometimes it is his responsibility to correct them. Quite often he is only too anxious to advertise or magnify them for his own selfish ends. The man intent on spiritual progress has a different outlook; he cultivates the habit of looking out for the goodness, the talent, the wisdom, the beauty and the greatness in others. By dwelling on the good points and achievements of others he makes them more friendly and cooperative; he stimulates the development of those qualities in them as well as himself; and he not only makes himself more receptive to the nobler impulses but also

pays reverence to the Supreme Lord who is the source of all goodness and greatness.

Says Sri Krishna:

> Reason, wisdom, non-illusion, forgiveness, truth, self-restraint, calmness, pleasure, pain, existence, non-existence, fear and also courage; X/4

> Harmlessness, equanimity, content, austerity, almsgiving, fame and obloquy, are the various characteristics of the beings issuing from Me. X/5

We now come to verse 34 which is very important:

> And I am the all-devouring death. I am the prosperity of those who are prosperous; and of feminine qualities I am fame, fortune, speech, memory, intelligence, constancy and forbearance. X/34

Here Sri Krishna has identified Himself with several qualities or conditions such as fame, prosperity, speech, memory and intelligence, which are of great value for living a full and happy life. Thus He has used the strongest possible language to glorify these qualities which are erroneously believed by some to be of a worldly or rather ungodly nature. Other things being equal, God manifests Himself more in the well-to-do than in the poor, more in the celebrated than in the commonplace, more in a genius than in a dunce, more in the strong than in the weak, more in those who have the gift of speech than in those who have not. Sri Krishna does not eulogise weakness, stupidity or poverty as a free passport to the Kingdom of God.

The manifestations of God's power and splendour are countless. Yet He is infinitely greater than any and all of them. In the aggregate they represent no more than a fragment of His glory:

> But of what use is the knowledge of all these details to thee, O Arjuna? Having pervaded this whole universe with a fragment of Myself, I remain. X/42

Subnormal Manifestations of God

If God is ever present in your life as friend and helper, he also comes to you now and again in the form of the poor or hungry, sick or sorrowful, careworn or oppressed, to claim from you a very small part of what He Himself has given you. Do not despise the men who come to you with a begging bowl. True enough, they are Vibhutis in a negative sense, that is to say, a negation of God's glory and splendour. Nevertheless, they are His manifestations and they too serve the same purpose as other Vibhutis in as much as they are a means to take you Godwards. Whatever you do to them, you do to God. If you serve them, you serve the Lord; and you cannot serve the Lord except by serving His creatures. In fact, nothing can be more ridiculous than to make offerings of flowers, fruit and sweets to the Lord, who gives you everything and needs nothing, while neglecting His manifestations in flesh and blood who look up to you for food or clothing, for advice and help, sympathy and encouragement. The need of the needy and the suffering of the man in distress are your opportunities to cultivate the virtues of compassion, charity and self-denial which are indispensable for spiritual advancement. The Gita requires the disciple to take delight in promoting the welfare of all creatures. Love for the Lord can never be complete unless it includes loving service to those less fortunate than yourself.

Other Views

To bring home the lessons of Vibhuti Yoga the views of some eminent thinkers are given here.

Acharya Vinoba writes in his Talks on the Gita:

"First, we should see His presence clearly in the big things. The Lord manifest in mighty natural objects like the sea and the mountain catches our eyes at once. Once we have seen these mighty forms of God, we shall recognize that every drop of water and every grain of sand is filled with the same God.

"The truth is: if we cannot see the Lord in mother, teacher, saint and child, in what other forms can we see Him? There is no nobler form of God than these. Learn first these

gentle and familiar forms of the Lord. In these the Lord is written in bold, clear letters.

"Gross and subtle, pure and complex—learn all this and realise in the end that there is no place where the Lord is not. In every atom He alone is present. From the ant to the universe, He spreads. The Lord who cares equally for all, the compassionate one who is all knowledge, tenderness, skill, holiness and beauty, He stands on all sides everywhere."

Dr. Harry Emerson Fosdick of America has voiced identical views. He says:

"God is so great in his vastness that we can think of Him only in symbolic terms, but he has a near range.

"I believe we come close to God wherever there is beauty, love, integrity, truth. Often if you ask people where God is, their thoughts go shooting off among the stars; but it is deep down within human life that we find God. God is love and he who abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him. The simple truth is that we discover the Divine wherever love illumines life.

"No one can believe in all of God. Believe in as much of God as you can—that is the way to start. Begin with the beauty of Beethoven or Shelley or of a bird singing in the trees. Could blind chance create symmetry and rhythm and light and colour and melody? Or begin with the mathematics of the universe. The great mathematicians—Euclid, Newton, Einstein—did not create mathematical order; they uncovered the truth that was already there, or begin with the great character of the men and women who have made this world a better place for the human family to live in. They too, are the near range of God."

Another thinker, Basil King, writes in his book *The Conquest of Fear:*

"I think it necessary to train the thought to seeing God as expressing Himself in all the good and pleasant and enjoyable things that come to us. This means forming a habit. It means saying to oneself daily, hourly, 'This is God' 'That is God' of incidents, person and things we have rarely thought of in that relation....

"But all good things must express the Universal, and all discovery of truth, whether by religion, science, philosophy or

imaginative art must be discovery in God. The Ten Commandments and the Sermon on the Mount are discoveries in God, but so are the advances in knowledge made by Plato, Aristotle, Roger Bacon and Thomas Edison. He shows Himself through Abraham, Moses, Isaiah and St. Paul, but also through Homer, Shakespeare, Michael Angelo, Beethoven, Darwin, George Eliot, William James and Henry Irving. I take the names at random as illustrating different branches of endeavour.... No one department of human effort is specially His, or His special expression. The church cannot be so more than the stage or music more than philosophy....

"When the Lord restores sight to a blind man, or Peter and John cause a lame man to walk, we see manifestations of God, but we see equal manifestations of God when one man gives us the telephone, another the motor car, and another wireless telegraphy. Whatever declares His power declares Him; and whatever declares Him is a means by which we press upward to the perception of His loving almightiness. The advance may be irregular but it is advance; and all advance is advance towards Him."

Conclusion

We look to God to reveal Himself in miracles, supernatural events, prophets and incarnations, sylvan solitudes and mountain caves. But all the time He is revealing Himself to us in the beauties of nature, in piety and goodness, in nobility of character, in works of imagination and art, in discoveries and inventions, in feats of adventure, exploration and self-sacrifice, in the great as well as in the poor, the lowly and the lost. We ignore the God near at hand while seeking Him far away.

A few there may be who can devote themselves exclusively to penance and Sadhana, but the multitude, worried by the problems of keeping body and soul together, require something simpler and more practicable for the realisation of Self. For them the various manifestations of God provide a convenient bridge from the weak and finite man to the Almighty and infinite God.

Vibhuti Yoga is a simple way of establishing union with the Supreme. It teaches that the whole of creation and all things

in it are manifestations of God, through whom God can be approached more easily than directly. We should look out for God not only in the far distant infinity, in secret or sacred places, but also in home and office, factory and market place. Realisation or vision of God cannot be complete if it ignores His concrete manifestations all around us, specially those in human forms.

Though all the manifestations of God's power and glory can be used as aids to progress, there are two types which are particularly suited for this purpose—those who help or serve you and those who need your help. The former brings you God's blessings and gifts, gratitude shown to them is gratitude shown to God. The latter give you an opportunity to serve God, and return His love and kindness—through His creatures. Between the two of them these varieties of manifestations provide ready links by which you can establish constant union with God through gratitude and loving service.

Another implication of Vibhuti Yoga is that work should be done with superlative skill. Strive for superexcellence in your calling. Appreciate goodness, wisdom, heroism wherever you find them; encourage them in others as far as possible but also cultivate them in yourself. In the words of Swami Vivekananda, "First let us be gods and then help others to be gods. Be and make. Let this be our motto".

Vibhuti Yoga requires everyone to make himself an image of God, as near an approximation of Him as possible. For this purpose he should utilise all his time and energy, every opportunity as well as difficulty, to improve himself, to actualise his hidden potentialities and to make himself as valuable a servant as possible of God's kingdom on earth.

It is a speciality of the Gita that from beginning to end it has laid very great stress on the cultivation of divine qualities —not merely the qualities necessary for a saint or ascetic but also those needed by a successful man of the world. The characteristics of a man of steady mind, of a Bhakta, of a man of wisdom, of one who has transcended the three Gunas, and the whole of Chapter XVI explaining divine and demoniac properties, are intended to impress on the aspirant the need to admire the noble qualities in others and awaken them in himself. There is none so fallen but the seeing eye can perceive

in him the traces of the godly properties. There is none so perfect that he cannot develop himself further. And the person who sees the wisdom, power and goodness of God everywhere and tries to develop these qualities in himself is practising Vibhuti Yoga.

According to the popular and narrow conception of religion the seeker of God can cultivate spirituality only by means of special Sadhanas like meditation or japa. A broader notion of religion requires that the aspirant should not only be spiritual but also good and noble; he must practise goodness. The Gita puts forward a still higher concept of religion. The aspirant's curriculum should include the pursuit not only of sadhanas and goodness but also of greatness in his own field of endeavour.

Every act of perceiving God in any of His manifestations is an act of union or contact with Him, however fleeting or imperfect. The more you train yourself to see and feel the presence of God in creatures and things, qualities and actions, the more links you forge with Him. This is one way He can be constantly remembered and thought of. By itself each single glimpse of the glory of God, each isolated perception of His mercy, wisdom and omnipresence in the world may not amount to much. But when such glimpses and thoughts come in quick succession and fill your whole life, their cumulative effect is marvellous and they lead you to an entirely new way of life. When you are constantly reverting to God in thought and speech, when you love Him with all your heart and serve Him through all your activities, your whole nature is divinised, you live and move and have your being in God, and are established in 'unfaltering yoga.'

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The Yoga of The Vision of the Cosmic Form

A Practical Demonstration

"THIS DISCOURSE", wrote Gandhiji, "is a favourite with the Bhaktas. Here there is no argument, there is pure poetry. Its solemn music reverberates in one's ears and it is not possible to tire of reading it again and again."

In earlier chapters it was explained that the world is nothing but a manifestation or embodiment of God. In His abstract aspect He is far, far above the world and infinitely superior to it; in his concrete aspect He is all and in all, He himself has assumed an infinity of forms as creatures and things and phenomena, as life and consciousness, as heat and light, sound and smell, as activity and movement. He is not only seated in the hearts of all creatures but also constitutes every atom of their bodies from head to foot. All beings abide in Him like cells in the body of a living organism.

But Arjuna was not to be satisfied with a mere verbal description of God, even though given by Sri Krishna himself. In true scientific spirit, he asked for a practical or ocular demonstration of what he had been told earlier. Another reason

for his request was that the teaching of Sri Krishna seemed to run counter to the popular notion that God is entirely apart from His creation, that He and the world stand eternally in opposition to each other and that He rules the earth by remote control, occasionally showering blessings on their subjects but for ever remaining rigidly aloof. Arjuna, therefore, felt curious and expressed a desire to see with his eyes what he had heard with his ears.

Strange though the request was, Sri Krishna had no hesitation in granting it, not only for the sake of his beloved pupil but of all humanity.

It may be queried whether Arjuna's cosmic vision was not a pure myth. The simple answer is that if God really possesses all the power and wisdom he is generally credited with, if He can create a universe that has no limits, can He not also produce a picture of it, stereoscopic, pulsating with life and magnificent, complete but perhaps on a reduced scale, for the edification of a devoted and enquiring soul? He who made the cosmos can surely make replicas of it. It is simply a case of television on a grand scale. But even without going into this question, one can learn the lessons that flow from Arjuna's cosmic vision.

While granting Arjuna's prayer, the Lord said:

> Behold My forms, O Partha, by hundreds and thousands, manifold and divine, and of many colours and shapes. XI/5
>
> Behold the Adityas, the Vasus, the Rudras, the two Ashvins and also the Maruts; behold many marvels never seen ere this, O Bharata. XI/6
>
> Behold here today, O Arjuna, the whole universe, with the moving and the unmoving and whatever else thou desirest to see, all unified in My body. XI/7

The reader will note that whereas Arjuna wanted to see God's form omnipotent, Shri Krishna offered to show him not one but innumerable forms. Obviously, God cannot be confined into any one particular form, however glorious. He is either formless or manifest in an endless variety of forms.

But the cosmic form of the Lord is too dazzling, too vast

and too subtle to be seen by ordinary human eyes. Therefore Shri Krishna gave Arjuna divine sight by means of which he could apprehend not only the immensity, the variety and details of creation but also the reality behind them. The ordinary eye can see only the gross physical form; the divine eye sees the outer shape as well as the inner informing spirit. The divine eye is not a magical or miraculous eye but the enlightened vision which perceives God in all things.

Thereupon Sri Krishna showed to Arjuna His supreme form as Parameshwar and Sanjaya reported a brief description of it to Dhritarashtra in the following words:

> With many mouths and eyes, with many marvellous sights, with many divine ornaments, with many uplifted divine weapons. XI/10
>
> Wearing heavenly garlands and raiments, anointed with celestial perfumes, all wonderful, resplendent, with faces on all sides. XI/11
>
> If the splendour of a thousand suns were to blaze out together in the sky, that might resemble the glory of that Mahatma. XI/12
>
> There in the body of the God of gods, Arjuna beheld the whole universe with its many divisions, all gathered together in one. XI/13

Verses 7 and 13 emphasise (1) the essential unity of all creation and (2) the potential divinity of all earthly life, because the entire creation has emanated from God and is merely a personification of Him.

Arjuna's Prayer

When Arjuna beheld the universal form of the Lord he was naturally struck with wonder and awe and addressed a few remarkable verses to the Cosmic form. Some of these verses are reproduced below so that the reader may share with Arjuna, however inadequately, the feeling aroused in Arjuna by the cosmic vision:

> Within Thy form, O God, the gods I see,

All grades of beings with distinctive marks,
Brahma, the Lord, upon His lotus throne,
The Rishis all, the Serpents the divine. *XI/15*
With mouths, eyes, arms, breasts multitudinous,
I see Thee everywhere, unbounded form,
Beginning, middle, end, nor source of Thee,
Infinite Lord, infinite Form, I find. XI/16
Lofty beyond all thought, unperishing,
Thou treasure-house supreme, all immanent,
Eternal Dharma's changeless guardian Thou;
As immemorial Man I think of Thee. *XI/18*
By Thee alone are filled the earth, the heavens,
And all the regions that are stretched between;
The triple worlds sink down, O mighty one
Before thine awful manifested Form. XI/20
Thy mighty form, with many mouths and eyes,
Long-armed, with thighs and feet innumerate,
Vast-bosomed, set with many fearful teeth,
The worlds see terror struck, as also I. XI/23
First of the gods, most ancient man Thou art;
Supreme receptacle of all that lives;
Knower and known, the dwelling place on high;
In Thy vast form the universe is spread. XI/38
Salutations to Thee in front, salutations to Thee behind,
Salutations to Thee on every side, O All!
Infinite in might and immeasurable in strength,
Thou pervadest all and art everyone. XI/40
If thinking Thee but friend, importunate,
O Krishna! Or O Yadava! O friend!
I cried unknowing of Thy majesty,
And careless in the fondness of my love; XI/41
If jesting I irreverence showed to Thee,
At play, reposing, sitting or at meals,
Alone, O sinless One, or with my friends,
Forgive my error, O Thou boundless one. XI/42
Father of worlds, of all that moves and stands,
Worthier of reverence than the guru's self,
There is none like to Thee. Who passeth Thee?
Pre-eminent Thy power in all the worlds. XI/43
Therefore I fall before Thee; with my body

I worship as is fitting; bless Thou me.
As father with the son, as friend with friend,
With the beloved as lover, bear with me. XI/44

Win for Thyself Renown!

Verses 33 and 34 are a clarion call to vigorous action in order to win success and glory in life.

Therefore stand up! Win for thyself renown,
Conquer thy foes, enjoy the wealth-filled realm.
By Me they are already overcome.
Be thou the outward cause, left-handed one. XI/33
Drona and Bhishma and Jayadratha,
Karna and all the other warriors here,
Are slain by Me. Destroy them fearlessly,
Fight! Thou shalt crush thy rivals in the field. XI/34

Both these verses are very important. They bring out categorically and forcefully what was hinted indirectly, though repeatedly, in the last chapter, namely Sri Krishna's appeal to mankind to acquire greatness and glory in all walks of life.

These stanzas are largely self-explanatory. Though addressed to Arjuna, they call upon all mankind to engage in multifarious enterprises so that while, on one hand, the individual wins glory and renown, on the other the world grows in wisdom, goodness and happiness. As nothing can be gained without hard work and strength, the aspirant is called upon to meet the challenges of life bravely. He has to stand up and fight and conquer his foes; these may be his internal weaknesses; the external circumstances which are trying to keep him down; the problems confronting him in his professional work or the enemies casting covetous eyes upon his country. And the aspirant is assured that if in response to duty, he fights fearlessly, he would crush his rivals in the field; because with God on his side, everything becomes possible for him. So long as he treads the path of righteousness, so long as he does what he ought to do in a selfless spirit, he can confidently count upon God's help in all his undertakings.

In stanza 33 the words, "Be thou the outward cause" are

of profound significance. They mean that though God can do any and everything even by His merest wish, yet He wants man to execute His plans for Him, to act as the external agent of his Will. In the words of Radhakrishnan, "The ideas of God are worked out through human instrumentality. If we are wise, we so act that we are instruments in His hand.... The establishment of the Kingdom of God on earth is a cooperative enterprise between God and man. Man is a co-sharer in the work of creation." Man's tireless toil is necessary for cosmic purposes and the essence of spiritual life consists in devoting all one's time, talent and energy to the accomplishment of these purposes.

The Supreme Verse

He who doeth actions for Me, whose supreme good I am, My devotee, freed from attachment, without enmity towards any being, he cometh unto Me, O Pandava. XI/55

Shankaracharya and even some modern commentators like Vinoba and Radhakrishnan have held this verse to be the quintessence of the Gita. In view of its importance it is necessary to discuss its meaning in some detail. We shall take up each of its clauses separately.

For reaching or realising God the aspirant is required to fulfil the following five conditions:

(1) He doeth actions for God. This is the most important clause in this verse. If the aspirant ceases to work, he blocks all chance of his reaching God. Some thinkers believe that spiritual sadhanas are all the work man is required to do. This, however, is a one-sided view. For man cannot escape the responsibility of providing food, clothing, shelter etc. for himself as well as the community. Therefore worldly activities are indispensable for the common man and ordinarily no individual or nation can neglect them without coming to grief.

As a matter of fact, the vast majority of people work, but only for themselves. They pursue wealth, power and even God from no higher motive than to advance their own interests. All such activities are the private business of the individual in contradistinction with the work of God whose object is

Lokasangraha. True devotees of God regard themselves as His instruments or as servants of the Divine Government, test all their actions on the touchstone of God's pleasure, work as God works, work with the utmost zeal and skill but for the good of society, and share with others the fruits they acquire by their labours. The worldly person works for self-ful motives; the man of God works with the same industry and efficiency but in an unselfish spirit, from considerations of duty and for the welfare of the world, in order to please the Lord.

(2) His supreme goal is God. He regards the pleasure of God as the highest goal of his life and other things as secondary. By all his thoughts, words and deeds he seeks the approval and grace of the Lord.

(3) He is a devotee. He is a lover of God and serves Him to the best of his ability in the form of the universe. He worships the Lord abiding in all creatures and not merely the deity enshrined in a temple or in his own heart. His heart is with God wherever he may be and whatever he may be doing.

(4) He is free from attachment. This does not mean that man becomes callous or insensitive. On the contrary, he loves all creatures, shares their joys and sorrows and does his best to promote their interests. But he remains mentally unattached to them. Likewise he makes use of his possessions and acquisitions, enjoys them and takes care of them but does not allow his mind to be contaminated by them, even as a lotus remains untouched by the surrounding waters.

(5) He is without enmity towards any being. The aspirant does not bear hatred or ill will towards anyone. He loves all creatures but without sacrificing duty on the altar of sentiment. Inwardly he sees God in everything, but outwardly his actions are determined by his duty. He takes disciplinary measures against offenders; he punishes criminals; he does not hesitate to use force against those who attack his country. But inspite of taking such action, when circumstances so require, he maintains an attitude of kindness and love towards all.

The Significance of the Universal Form

With a practical demonstration this discourse has brought to a culmination the philosophy of the Gita in regard to (*a*) the

nature of God, (*b*) His relationship with His creation, and (*c*) the mutual relationships of different creatures with one another.

The cosmic form of the Lord, it will be noticed, is not a simple form corresponding to the customary descriptions of Vishnu, Shiva, Durga or any other deity. Rather, it is a composite of innumerable forms of various colours and shapes, because it includes all beings and the entire universe. In fact, the Universal Form would not deserve that title if it left out any part or detail of the universe, however insignificant. In short, the universe itself is one cosmic form of the Lord; the form in which the Supreme Spirit has concretised and clothed himself: the form in which the One has manifested himself as Many, the Infinite as finite, the Perfect as imperfect. This is the form which, though filled with God, effectively conceals Him from all but those who earnestly seek Him.

Some important features of the cosmic form shown to Arjuna were as follows:

1. There are three accounts of the Universal Form, namely those by Sri Krishna (verses 5 to 7), by Sanjaya (verses 10 to 13) and by Arjuna (verses 15 to 30 and 36 to 39). They are all unanimous in emphasising the following three characteristics of God—

(*a*) All the countless objects and creatures in the world are forms, manifestations or representations of God.

(*b*) They are all parts of, and contained in the Cosmic Form of the Lord. He is their Supreme receptacle. All creatures live and move and have their being in His infinite body.

(*c*) Although these innumerable entities appear separate and different from one another, in reality they all constitute one vast super-organism. Being parts of the body of God, they are all interconnected and inter-dependent. It follows that no one can hurt another without hurting himself. We serve our interests best by helping others. Each has to live for all and all have to live for one another. Everyone should develop himself to the utmost for the general good.

2. The Supreme Spirit pervades and informs the entire universe just as the human soul pervades and informs the entire human body.

3. As the first of the gods, the Supreme Lord is the source

of all things. He creates, sustains and destroys. Above all, He is the Guardian of Righteousness. He is ever watchful and active for the protection of the good, for the destruction of evil and for the welfare and progress of the world. Therefore, it is the duty of every one, so to live and act in the world, that it would be happier and better for his coming.

4. As the world is the creation, manifestation and personification of God, and is filled with God, it is sacred. It is not a place of horror but of joy. Life on earth is a blessing of God. It is not intended to degrade or defile us but to make us purer, wiser, nobler. The aspirant should deem it a great privilege, this invitation to God's feast, to live as a play-mate of God and to participate in His work, however humble or toilsome his assignment. He should regard himself as a servant of the Supreme Ruler of the world. He should develop his abilities, actual as well as potential, and work hard so as to become a worthy, and if possible, a distinguished member of God's government.

5. The cosmic form is infinite, boundless, without beginning, middle, end or source. Composed of countless beings, it possesses numberless eyes, mouths, breasts, arms and feet. God's eyes are infinite because He sees everything even in the remotest and most secret of places. In another sense God's eyes and mouths are countless because the eyes of all creatures are God's eyes and every mouth that feeds is His mouth. God's arms are numberless because He possesses infinite strength and also because he has the arms of all creatures working out His cosmic purpose.

6. God is benign and merciful but also awful and terrible. Not only is evil destroyed but all created things perish at the hands of Time, the Destroyer. Destruction, however, does not mean annihilation but only change and renovation. Destruction is necessary to keep the world ever fresh and young, for, says Sri Aurobindo, "It is by destroying and renewing that the Master of Life does his long work of preservation. More, destruction is the first condition of progress. Inwardly, the man who does not destroy his lower self formations, cannot rise to a greater existence. Outwardly also, the nation or community or race which shrinks too long from destroying and replacing its past forms of life, is itself destroyed, rots

and perishes and out of its debris other nations, communities and races are formed" (XI/20, 23)

The Yoga of Cosmic Vision

The title of this discourse is the Yoga of the vision of the universal form (of God) Let us now see what kind of Yoga it is

As already explained, the universe being simply a manifestation or personification of God, is itself one of His universal forms As God is omnipotent, He can no doubt assume countless universal forms, but for us the manifest universe is itself a very convenient universal form of the Lord As the cosmic form of God is ever present with the aspirant in the shape of the world, what he needs is not another universal form of the Lord, ethereal and transient, but better instruments of perception, the intellect and senses—by which he may see the Supreme Spirit present everywhere, even though hidden, in the world of matter It is to the purification and perfection of his entire personality that all his efforts must be directed so that he may be conscious of the living presence of God at all times, in all creatures and things in all aspirations and strivings, and recognise all the work of the world as God's own work

It is necessary to draw a distinction between the vision of God's universal form and vision of God in one of His traditional forms as Rama, Krishna Durga Vishnu Shiva etc According to the popular belief a vision of the latter type is indicative of God realisation or at least a very high stage of spiritual attainment But as a matter of fact there is no justification for this belief When we recall the examples of Ravana, Duryodhana and a host of other evil doers, who were lucky enough to get a darshan of God, it becomes evident that mere darshan of God does not necessarily transform a man's nature or make him a saint Being primarily a gift of God in response to prayer or an ardent wish God vision no doubt represents an achievement, but the latter may be quite unconnected with moral or spiritual excellence In this connection Radhakrishnan's comments are noteworthy He says 'The Gita does not end after the tremendous experience of the celestial

vision.... The Supreme is the background for the never ending procession of finite things. Arjuna has seen this truth, but he has yet to live it by transmuting his whole nature into the willing acceptance of the Divine. A fleeting vision, however vivid and permanent its effects may be, is not complete attainment. The search for abiding reality, the quest of final truth, cannot end in emotional satisfaction or fitful experience."

In fact Sri Krishna has clarified this in several verses of the Gita:

> He who sees Me present in all beings and sees all beings existing in Me, I am never out of sight of him, nor is he ever out of sight of Me. VI/30
>
> Verily he is the seer who sees the Supreme Lord as the only imperishable substance abiding equally in all perishable beings. XIII/27

But the vision of the universal form of God stands on a different footing. Seeing a special form of God once or even several times does not make a man 'Nitya-Yukta', 'Satata Yukta' or 'Adhyatma-nitya', that is to say well established in constant union with God. But he who practises the yoga of vision of the universal form of the Lord will enjoy constant communion with God. For he will see and worship the Lord abiding in all beings (VI/31). He will remember God at all times (VIII/7) and perform all the acts of his life as an offering to the Lord. (IX/27).

When Arjuna beheld the cosmic form of the Lord, he realised from direct experience that God is everywhere; that He alone fills the earth, the heavens and all space; that he permeates all and is everyone; and that all objects and creatures, though existing as separate entities, are in reality members of His vast body. Arjuna, therefore, offered salutations to Him in front, behind and on all sides (XI/40). Any one in search of God can do likewise. Life offers endless opportunities for the adoration and service of God in any of the innumerable forms in which He comes to us in our daily life.

Finally, a word as to how God may be worshipped and served in His universal form—based on Satavalekar's brilliant commentary.

When you wish to serve your father, mother or anyone else, your aim of course is to serve their real being, which is their soul. But as there is no easy way of getting at their soul directly, you serve their body which is the outer covering of the inner being. Further, since it is usually not practicable to serve the entire body at once, you serve a part at a time according to its requirements—taking care that in serving any one part you do not hurt the other parts or the body as a whole. In this way, service of a part of the body becomes the service of the entire body, which in turn amounts to the service of the inner spirit or the real man.

In the same way the task of worshipping or serving the infinite and formless God, which at first sight appears impossible, is brought within easy reach of man once it is realised that the Supreme Spirit too has a gross body, namely the manifest universe. He can be conveniently and successfully approached by serving His body or any part of it—in other words any section of His creation—care again being taken that this service of one part of the world or one section of society is not carried out at the expense of the other parts or of the whole. It is easier and also more fruitful to worship and serve the Lord personified in the world around us than the Lord seated in some unknown and far off heaven or in a corner of a temple or church. This is the gist of the teaching of the Yoga of the vision of the universal form and is explained more fully in the next chapter.

12

....

The Yoga of Devotion

Manifest Versus Unmanifest God

This is one of the shortest chapters of the Gita and it is as sweet as it is short. In very clear words it declares that (1) the worship of the God manifest in the cosmos that is worship of God through His creation is superior to the worship of the formless and infinite God and (2) renunciation of the fruit of actions is the best sadhana for the common man. The verses which enumerate the characteristics of a true devotee are fit for frequent recitation and reflection.

At the end of the preceding chapter Sri Krishna called upon Arjuna to work for God and be devoted to Him. As God has two aspects, one the absolute, unmanifest and attributeless and the other the manifest with forms and attributes, Arjuna enquires at the beginning of this discourse as to which of these two aspects of the Supreme Spirit is better suited for worship. This question has a special significance because of the common belief that the formless, inactive and eternal aspect of God is superior to His manifest, active form. Arjuna said:

> The devotees who ever united with you adore you as possessed of form and attributes and those who adore only the imperishable, formless Brahma—of these who are the better knowers of Yoga? XII/1

To Arjuna's query Sri Krishna gave a categorical answer that the best versed in Yoga are those who worship the God manifest in the world, who live and work as He does, who recognise the cosmos as His physical body and who therefore try to serve Him by serving His creatures Sri Krishna said

> I consider them to be the best Yogis who, with their mind fixed on Me, are ever united with Me and worship Me with supreme faith XII/2
> Those who worship the Indestructible, the Ineffable, the Unmanifested, Omnipresent and Unthinkable, the Unchanging Eternal, controlling the senses even minded towards all, devoted to the welfare of all beings these also come unto Me XII/3, 4

The reader will note that in verse 1 Arjuna does not talk of mere Yogis but of satata Yogis, and likewise in verse 2 Sri Krishna refers only to Nitya Yogis or perpetual Yogis and not to partial or part time Yogis

Commenting on these verses Sri Krishna Prem writes

'There is in fact but one Path and if we compare verse 4 of the present chapter, which defines the character of him who worships the Unmanifest with verses 13 19, which give the character of him who is devoted to the Life in all, we see that they are, in effect, the same

'Not by attempting an impossible rejection of the world of sense experience but by 'restraining and subduing the senses, not by trying to turn his back on all forms but by regarding all forms with an equal vision' not by achieving a stony indifference to the joys and sorrows of the world but by being 'devoted to the welfare of all beings, does the true worshipper of the Unmanifest Eternal attain his goal

The path of knowledge—that is meditation on the attributeless aspect of God—is also a true path but beset with

innumarable difficulties. Says Sri Krishna:

> Greater is the difficulty of those whose minds are set on the Unmanifested, for the goal of the Unmanifested is very hard for the embodied to reach. XII/5
> On the other hand, those who worship Me dedicating all actions to Me and intent on Me and meditating on Me with Ananya Yoga; XII/6
> For them whose heart is set on Me I become very soon the deliverer from the ocean of the mortal Samsar. XII/7

Why does Sri Krishna say in verse 2 that those aspirants are the best who worship Him, the Manifest God? Because meditation on the Unmanifest is not only extremely difficult for common people but also cannot lead them to the greatest heights of perfection. Meditation on the Unmanifest God is generally a partial Yoga as it links only the mind to God. Moreover, union with the Unmanifest God is inferior to union with the Supreme Lord who includes the Manifest as well as the Unmanifest and is higher than both. But, he who worships the manifest God, seeks union with Him with his entire being—his hands and feet, his organs of perception as well as his emotions and the intellect. He develops and rounds off his whole personality and at the same time also promotes the welfare of the society in which he lives.

Commenting on verse 6 Sri Krishna Prem writes: "If then both paths are essentially the same, wherein lies the special difficulty of the Path of the Unmanifested? It lies in the fact that the worshipper of the Unmanifested has nothing to which he can fasten his mind, for that One is beyond all objects of sense, beyond even all concepts of mind.

"Fatally easy is it for the soul to sink back on the earth, loveless and sterile. Appearances may be preserved but yet the heart within is eaten all away and the disciple treads the false Unmanifested Path, rejecting forms as maya, fearing even to do an act of mercy lest some bondage for his soul be the result; "To perish doomed is he who out of fear of Mara refrains from helping man lest he should act for self" (Voice of Silence)

"Therefore Sri Krishna recommends the other Path, the

Manifested Path through the One Life The One is the same One, the Goal the same, but on this Path that One is manifest within the hearts of all"

Sri Aurobindo explains "The Supreme faith is that which sees God in all and to its eye the manifestation and the non-manifestation are one Godhead The perfect union is that which meets the Divine at every moment in every action and with all the integrality of the nature But those also who seek by a hard ascent after the indefinable, unmanifest, Immutable alone, arrive, says the Godhead, to Me For they are not mistaken in the aim, but they follow a more difficult and a less complete and perfect path And it must not be thought that because it is more arduous, therefore, it is a higher and more effective process

Swami Ramdas explains "The path of knowledge leads the aspirant only to the knowledge of the Atman and that through a rigorous discipline for the subdual of all the passions and desires of the heart and mind Of course the aspirant realises the indestructible, the infinite and eternal truth but he misses the supreme ecstasy of action The path is therefore not only difficult, because to subdue the mind and senses by severe austerities is a hard thing, but also it does not take the soul to the supreme personality of God who is at once the impersonal and formless Purusha and the manifest Prakriti This supreme Person is the Purushottama of the Gita

How to Worship the Manifest God ?

Sri Krishna says

Therefore fix your mind on Me and establish your intellect in Me alone, thereafter you will abide in Me There is no doubt of that XII/8

To fix the mind and the understanding on God is one method By constantly thinking of God man acquires a state in which he lives and moves and has his being in God Swami Chidbhavananda says "Man verily is where his mind is When this mind is made over to God, man is then verily in Divine Presence

If you cannot steadily fix the mind on Me then seek to attain Me by the Yoga of practice. XII/9

A lot of practice is required before the mind and the intellect can be fixed in steady contemplation on God. Whenever the mind turns to other things, it should be withdrawn from there and redirected to God. In this way through constant practice one can acquire the ability to fix the mind firmly on God.

If you are unable even to take to constant practice, be intent on doing actions for My sake; even by performing actions for My sake you will attain perfection. XII/10

The mind is very subtle and hard to control. So it may not be possible for common folk, even after hard practice, to fix their minds on God. Sri Krishna, therefore, suggests an easier method, namely to perform all actions as a servant of God, in His name or on His behalf, for His sake and pleasure. Man can attain perfection even by performing actions for the sake of the Lord.

If you are unable to do even this, seeking refusage in union with Me. Practise self control and renounce the fruit of all actions. XII/11

Working for the sake of the Lord—and not for one's petty self—requires a radical change in one's attitude, for which a fairly developed and well controlled mind is necessary. For some the transformation of personality proceeds from inside to outside; they first change their thoughts, which in turn change their actions. But for many the transformation follows a reverse course—from the gross or material to the subtle. They find it easier to change their thoughts by first changing their actions. For such the Lord suggests a still easier method; practise self control and share liberally with others all your possessions and gifts. The more you give, the more selfless you become. In course of time this simple habit of giving will divinise your entire life.

Better indeed is knowledge than practice (carried on without

proper insight); better than knowledge is meditation (Dhyana); better than meditation is the renunciation of the fruit of action; peace immediately folows renunciation. XII/12

For the average person it may be very difficult to work in a selfless spirit or for the sake of the Lord. But even if a man works selffully, he can still approach God by renouncing the fruits of his actions. This is the easiest and best method for all and is superior to that of pure meditation. A man worships God best by giving away his wealth, knowledge, time and energy for the benefit of His creatures. When the fruits of a man's labours are dedicated to God, his entire activity as well as the thoughts and feelings behind it, becomes spiritualised. Thus renunciation of the fruit of one's actions transforms one's whole life and uplifts one's entire being to God and brings supreme peace. A man marches towards God as he replaces self-seeking with self-giving.

As the topic of renunciation of the fruit of action, has already been dealt with in Chapter II, I will conclude this section with a few quotations from well known authorities.

Commenting on the technique of renunciation of the fruit of action (XII/11, 12) Sri Aurobindo writes, "All fruit has to be renounced, to be given up to the Power that directs the work, and yet the work has to be done that is imposed by It on the nature. For by this means the obstacle steadily diminishes and easily disappears, the mind is left free to remember the Lord and to fix itself in the liberty of the divine consciousness. And here the Gita gives an ascending scale of potencies and assigns *the palm of excellence to this Yoga of desireless action....* But more powerful still is the giving up of the fruit of one's work, because that immediately destroys all cause of disturbance and brings and preserves automatically an inner calm and peace, and calm and peace are the foundation on which all else becomes perfect and secure in possession by the tranquil spirit...."

Dr. Radhakrishnan explains: "Devotion, meditation and concentration are more difficult than renunciation of the fruits of action, Karmaphaltyaga. This latter destroys the source of unrest and brings about an inner calm and peace, which are the very foundations of spiritual life."

Renunciation of the fruits of one's labour is not only the easiest but also the best way to God-realisation. This is brought out very clearly by Swami Vidyananda. In his commentary named Gita Gaurava he says: "It is no sign of inferiority or littleness to be simplest. At the same time it is no sign of superiority or excellence to be difficult or complicated. If you want to follow this last and the simplest method of upasana (worship), you should not do it with any inferiority complex. On the contrary you should consider yourself to be the best among all the devotees. You should know that knowledge excels the practice of union with the Lord; meditation excels the knowledge; the renunciation of the fruits of all actions excels meditation; from renunciation proceeds peace everlasting."

Characteristics of a True Devotee

In seven charming verses Sri Krishna details the characteristics of a devotee who is dear to Him. These are the qualities the disciple must build into his character. Sri Krishna says:

> He who beareth no ill will to any being, who is friendly and compassionate to all, who is free from pride and the feeling of 'I' and 'mine', even-minded in pain and pleasure, and forgiving. XII/13
>
> Content, a perpetual Yogi, self-controlled, of firm resolve, who has dedicated his mind and intellect to Me, he My devotee is dear to Me. XII/14

Only the constant Yogi is the beloved of the Lord—he who is united with Him in all his thoughts, words and deeds, who sees Him in all things and loves Him by loving all creatures. He complies with both the definitions of a Yogi, being skilful and even—minded in his works.

> He who is not a source of annoyance to the world and who does not feel agitated by the world, who is not carried away by any impulse of joy, anger or fear, he is dear to Me. XII/15

The true devotee realises that God appears in all creatures,

circumstances and events. So he is good to all and knows that they are good to him. He is not swayed by joy or envy, anxiety or fear. He is at peace with the world.

> He who craves nothing, who is both internally and externally pure, expert, impartial to all, unruffled, dedicating every undertaking to God, he may devotee, is dear to Me. XII/16

The true devotee exercises a check on his wants. He pays special attention to purity, knowing full well that the most important factor in purity is the purity of the means of livelihood. He is not a slapdash worker but efficient in whatever he does. He is a man of resolution (XII/14). He renounces all works to God, by dedicating them to God, by doing them for His sake, by doing them for the good of the world, and not for any self-ful end of his own. The comments of Sri Krishna Prem are instructive. He says: "Note the word expert (daksha). There are some who in the name of devotion give up their grip on life and muddle through all things, making spirituality an excuse for unpracticalness. The true disciple is no mere ecstatic dreamer, one so dazzled by the white eternal Light that he sees not his way among the shadows here. Rather, since "Yoga is skill in action", he shows by the fact that he performs all actions better than other men, that this Path leads to mastery of the world, not to a weak withdrawal".

> He who neither loveth nor hateth nor grieveth nor desireth, who renounces both good and evil, full of devotion, he is dear to Me. XII/17

The true devotee does not desire or rejoice in what is pleasant. He does not dread what is unpleasant or grieve over it. He remains unmoved by good or evil fortune.

> Alike to friend and foe and also in fame and ignominy, alike in heat and cold, pleasure and pain and free from attachment. XII/18
>
> Taking equally praise and reproach, enjoying silence, content with whatever comes unasked, homeless, steady minded and full of devotion, that man is dear to Me XII/19

The ideal devotee is not only full of devotion but also has a steady mind. He is not upset by praise or blame. He is established in unity. He controls his speech as well as thoughts. He is happy in whatever state he may be. He is not attached to his home or caste or family; his home is everywhere and no where. To quote Sri Krishna Prem again: "Like the pure mountain air that blows among the pines, fertilising all and yet attached to none, the disciple moves about amidst the throng of men; whether he lives in crowded cities or on lonely mountain peaks he is a homeless one, for though he may fulfil all social duties, yet neither family nor caste, nor race holds him in bondage".

> They verily who practise this life-giving wisdom as taught herein, endued with faith and taking Me as their highest aim, those devotees are surpassingly dear to Me. XII/20

Summing up the characteristics of a devotee of the Lord, Swami Ramdas writes: "His beloved is not merely the immutable aspect of God's existence which is beyond and above all manifestations, but also the active, all merciful Lord of the universe seated in the hearts of all beings and creatures. He sees God in all, he loves God in all and serves God in all. So all his life's activities in all fields of labour, for whomsoever they are done, are the adoration and service of the Lord. Hence he is ever merged in an infinite ocean of supreme and eternal joy. Verily his life becomes a wave of endless ecstasy. He is free and blissful like a child".

The reader will note that the devotee dear to the Lord is not a dreamy sort of person unmindful of society, or a recluse who cuts himself off from the world, or one who goes into a trance at will or bursts into tears on hearing the blessed name of the Lord or who sees a vision of God from time to time. He is a lover of life, a lover of the world, a lover of man and bird and beast, a lover of rivers and mountains, of flowers and trees, because the good God who made them loves them all. He is rather a practical man of the world who translates his love of God into acts of loving service to His creatures. He works incessantly for God. He has not merely controlled his mind but divinised his entire nature and life.

13

The Yoga of the Distinction between The Field and Its Knower

The Field and Its Knower

LIFE IS a great opportunity for self improvement, for developing one's latent powers and for the service of the Lord present everywhere in the creation Sri Krishna has expressed this idea beautifully by likening the human body to a field and the soul to the owner and tiller of the field He says

> This body, O Son of Kunti, is called the field, that which knoweth it is called the Knower of the field by the sages XIII/1

In a field a man reaps as he sows and the more skilful a farmer, the more he can get out of his field Likewise the human body is a field in which its master, the individual soul, can sow any kinds of seeds in the form of his own actions and raise whatever crops he desires Man is responsible for the plot of land God has given him for cultivation Like a farmer knowing his field, man must know his body, that is his own mental and physical equipment, and develop it to the highest pitch of

efficiency and productivity that is physically possible t attain.

A field allows both crops and weeds to thrive in it. But whil weeds grow spontaneously, crops require careful attention an hard work. Similarly in the field of his body, man reaps th fruits of his good and bad actions—the former of which requir judgment and effort while the latter seem to spring up automa tically and naturally. Proper digging, manuring, watering an weeding increase the fertility of the soil; so the human bod can be made to yield a better harvest by keeping it in a f condition, by training and education, by self-control and b wisely planned effort.

The human body is the field of Dharma, of action and c struggle—a glorious opportunity and wonderful means for at taining greatness in various fields of endeavour.

> Understand Me as the knower of the field in all fields, C Bharata. Knowledge as to the field and the knower of th field, that is deemed by Me as true knowledge. XIII/

There are countless fields (bodies) and knowers of the fiel (souls) in the world. They live as separate entities but in rea lity, they are all one, being pervaded and animated by the sam cosmic power. The same Supreme Spirit resides in all creature as the soul of their souls.

The popular notion in India, strenuously fostered by th common run of religious teachers, is that the only knowledg worth acquiring is the knowledge of God. To counter this fallac Sri Krishna has taught here in definite terms that true know ledge includes the knowledge of both body and soul; of matte and spirit; of God and the universe. Neither kind of knowledg is by itself complete or sufficient to take a man to his goal. A the Isha Upanishad has put it, a man needs knowledge both o things worldly and of the Spirit—the former in order to liv happily on earth and the latter in order to attain the Lif Eternal. The path of the knowledge is generally believed to b synonymous with quiescence and inactivity, but according t Sri Krishna it includes the active pursuit of any branch o knowledge such as science, literature, technology, arts medicine and engineering.

Characteristics of Spiritual Knowledge

Thereafter Sri Krishna mentions a few characteristics of spiritual knowledge. He equates spiritual knowledge with self-culture. Knowledge is not how much a man knows by heart or how eloquently he can talk. Knowledge is a way of living; it is character, skill in action, equimindedness, universal love, the ability to deal with men and things and situations properly, dexterity in averting difficulties or troubles and in handling them effectively, creation of new knowledge or original works of art or literature. Sri Krishna says:

> Humility, unpretentiousness, harmlessness, forgiveness, rectitude, service of the teachers, purity, steadfastness, self-control. XIII/7
>
> Dispassion towards the objects of the senses and also absence of egoism, insight into the pain and evil of birth, death, old age and sickness. XIV/8
>
> Unattachment, absence of self identification with son, wife or home, and constant balance of mind in wished for and unwished for events. XIII/9
>
> Unswerving devotion to Me by Ananya Yoga (knowing that there is none other than God), resort to sequestered and holy places, absence of enjoyment in the company of men. XIII/10
>
> Fixity in Self-knowledge, observing everywhere the object of true knowledge (God); all this is declared to be knowledge and what is opposed to it is ignorance. XIII/11

Rajaji explains: "Jnana is not fully expressed by 'knowledge' or 'wisdom'. It involves a complete transformation of oneself in accordance with the truth that is seen. Such transformation results from and at the same time leads to progressive realisation of one's unity with the rest of the world and of the whole world with God. Action becomes free and sinless once the motive of action is freed from selfish ends."

According to Swami Sivananda: "To identify oneself with the all-pervading Brahma is Jnana."

"To feel 'I am non-doer and non-enjoyer', is Jnana. To have a balanced mind in gain and loss, honour and dishonour,

pleasure and censure, victory and defeat, is Jnana... to behold the One Self in all beings—this is wisdom."

It is obvious that these qualities can only be developed and tested in the midst of worldly activities. They are more or less the same as those of a sthitaprajna or a true devotee.

These verses are largely self-explanatory. But a few words may be added to explain four of the qualities mentioned here.

Purity includes purity not only of body and clothing, not only of food and drink, but also of the means of livelihood, of thoughts, words and deeds, of trade and business, in fact of all the activities of life.

Insight into the pain and evil of birth, death old age and sickness does not make the man of knowledge more pessimistic, gloomy or depressed than others, insensitive and indifferent to the joys and sorrows of life or a fatalist. On the other hand, his knowledge makes him better prepared to face life with courage and confidence. He does his best to ward off and alleviate the miseries of others as well as his own. He undertakes and supports activities intended to relieve the sufferings and promote the welfare of humanity.

Ananya Yoga is union with God with the realisation that in the entire universe there is none other than God. Such a yogi sees God, the object of his pursuits, always and everywhere and is therefore kind and compassionate, just and fair to all. He enjoys constant fellowship with God.

A wise man does not spend all his spare time in clubs and parties, public functions and entertainments, or in work that his helpers would gladly do for him. He recognises the value of quiet reflection and introspection. He seeks silence and solitude because they stimulate the sub-conscious mind and are essential for all brain work of a high order, such as originality and inventiveness, thinking out problems and their solutions. In these moments of quietness he may truly accomplish his best work, hold communion with God, rest and refresh himself and recharge his battery for a fresh assault on work.

The Nature of God

Having described the marks of a man of knowledge, Sri Krishna

proceeds to expound the essentials of spiritual knowledge, which, when applied in daily life, enable a man to attain immortality. He says:

> Now I shall speak to you about that which ought to be known and knowing which one attains immortality. XIII/12

This knowledge of God, which holds the key to Life Eternal, is contained in the following verses:

> With hands and feet everywhere, with eyes and hands and mouths everywhere, with ears everywhere—He dwells in the world enveloping all. XIII/13
>
> Devoid of all senses, yet the perceiver of all sense objects; unattached, yet sustaining all; free from the Gunas (qualities) yet enjoying the qualities. XIII/14
>
> Without and within all beings, He constitutes both animate and inanimate creation. By reason of His subtlety, He is incomprehensible. He is far and near. XIII/15
>
> Not divided among beings and yet seated distributively, He is to be known as the supporter of beings. He destroys and He generates. XIII/16
>
> The light of all lights, He is said to be beyond the darkness of Maya; Knowledge, the object of knowledge, by knowledge to be reached, seated in the hearts of all. XIII/17
>
> The Supreme Spirit in the body is said to be the Witness, the Permitter, the Supporter, the Experiencer, the Great Lord and the Supreme Self. XIII/22
>
> As the all-pervading ether is not tainted by reason of its subtlety, even so the Self that is present in everybody, does not suffer any taint. XIII/33
>
> As the one sun illumines the whole world, so does the Lord of the Field illumine the whole field. XIII/34

As unmanifest and formless, God pervades all things. As manifest, His eyes, hands, feet etc. are everywhere because the eyes and hands of all creatures belong to Him. When you feed some one, it is God who eats. When a doctor treats a patient, it is God who receives the treatment. (XIII/13) In His absolute, unmanifest aspect God is devoid of senses, free from 'qualities'

and inactive. But in His manifest aspect He perceives all things; does all works and is the recipient of all pleasure and enjoyment. (XIII/14) He is present everywhere, far and near, inside and outside all things. All objects, living as well as non-living have come out of Him. (XIII/15) Though God assumes an infinitude of forms, He does not thereby undergo any fragmentation. His unity is not broken by the fact that he is present separately in each individual object. Even though in outward behaviour creatures have to act as separate entities, the wise man realises their essential oneness. (XIII/16) God is never affected by His own Maya. In fact he is the raft by which the ocean of Maya may be crossed by human beings. Many people seek God only in some high or remote heaven or in some holy temple or in the chamber of their own heart. As a matter of fact, God is present everywhere. In particular, he is present in the hearts of all creatures as the soul of their souls, as the source of their consciousness and as their active life principle. (XIII/17) Many people fondly believe that God is only infinite, impersonal and inactive and lives far, far away. They would do well to remember that He is ever present with them and in them, playing a variety of roles such as witness, guide, sustainer, experiencer etc. (XIII/22) All creatures are affected by their environment. Not so God. He is not contaminated by anything that he does or anything that happens in the universe. He is not changed when things change. He is not destroyed when things perish. (XIII/33)

In these verses Sri Krishna has emphasised that the Supreme Godhead has two seemingly contradictory aspects—seemingly because while they seem so to the limited intellect of man, they are fully reconciled in the superior wisdom of God. God is both absolute and relative, finite and infinite, perishable and imperishable, one and many, personal and impersonal, manifest and unmanifest, inactive and ever active, changeless and changeable, perfect and seeking perfection. Both these aspects represent God; neither is a complete picture by itself. In particular, it is an error to believe that the world and its activities—because they show imperfection and evil and consequently involve suffering—are unholy or undivine, entirely separate from God or even opposed to Him.

The body and soul together constitute man. Likewise the

Supreme Spirit and its body, the manifest creation together constitute the Supreme Person—Purushottama Purushottama alone, according to Sri Krishna, is the complete and comprehensive Godhead, who should be adopted by man as his true model and object of worship

God Vision

From times immemorial many people have regarded God vision as the final goal of all human endeavours Thus the aim which the teachers of the paths of meditation and knowledge usually place before their disciples is to see the light of God within their own hearts (XIII/24) Likewise in the path of devotion the disciple aspires to have a vision of God in the form dearest to him This is good as far as it goes But the Gita is not satisfied with such fleeting visions of God As God is present in all creatures, (XIII/26) the aspirant, according to the Gita should learn to see God not only in himself but also in others Sri Krishna has categorically declared here that the true way to see and reach God is to

(*a*) see and worship the Lord residing in all creatures (VI/31, XIII/27),

(*b*) see that all creatures, though they appear separate and different from one another, have in reality originated and evolved from the same Lord and have their existence in Him (XIII/30), and

(*c*) be friendly and compassionate to all, since their souls are in essence one with his own soul and with God

Sri Krishna says

> By meditation some behold the Self in the self by the self, others by the Yoga of knowledge and yet others by Karma Yoga XIII/24
>
> Arjuna, whatever being animate or inanimate, is born know that as emanated from the union of Kshetra (Matter) and Kshetrajnay (Spirit) XIII/26
>
> He who sees the Supreme Lord abiding equally in all beings never perishing when they perish, he verily sees XIII/27
>
> When he perceives the diversified existence of beings as rooted in one Supreme Being and growing forth from Him then

he reaches the Eternal. XIII/31

As he sees the Lord present equally everywhere, he does not injure his true Self by the self and thus he attains the supreme goal. XIII/28

Whatever exists in creation, whether rocks, plants or animals, is the product of the union of the Supreme Self (Purusha) with Material Nature (Prakriti). God is equally present in them all, though manifested to different degrees, as seen in their consciousness and intelligence. He alone sees truly who sees God equally existent in all beings—God who is imperishable and survives the death of all things. Such a seer does not harm any one, for he sees the same Lord in all. Thus seeing and living, he soon attains the highest goal.

The reader will recall that after teaching the basic principles of meditation in the sixth discourse Sri Krishna did not call upon the aspirant to see the light of God only in his own heart. On the other hand, (vide verses 30 and 31 of that chapter) He called upon man to see and worship the Lord present in all creatures.

In the words of Swami Ramdas: "The true vision of utter freedom and immortality comes when the Lord is seen residing equally in all creatures as the one imperishable Truth within the perishable forms. In this vision the Lord is seen as equally pervading through all existences and therefore as the one omnipresent Reality, and the soul who is blessed with this exalted experience walks the loftiest path."

14

....

The Yoga of the Classification of the Three Gunas

Man's divine Heritage

In the last chapter it was pointed out that whatever creature is born, animate or inanimate, it is from the union between the field (Matter or Prakriti) and the knower of the field, that is Spirit or God (XIII/26). The same teaching is reaffirmed here in a new light and with greater emphasis. Sri Krishna says:

> My Prakriti or Nature in her primordial, undeveloped state is the womb of all creatures; in that I place the seed (of consciousness). The birth of all beings follows from this combination of Matter and Spirit, O descendant of Bharata. XIV/3
>
> Of all the bodies that take birth from different wombs this Primordial Matter is the Mother, and I am the Procreating Father, O son of Kunti. XIV/4

It has been stated here in very definite terms that the entire universe has been created by and out of God. He is both father and mother of all creatures. Some of the practical implications of this truth are:

(1) As all human beings have been born of the same Supreme Father and Mother, their dealings with one another should be characterised by brotherly love and helpfulness.

(2) As the Supreme Lord is both father and mother of the world, it is sacred, potentially divine and essentially a place of joy. It is not a vale of tears or a chamber of horrors created by a cruel and despotic God who delights in harassing his helpless creatures.

(3) The body, being created and inhabited by God, is holy and divine like the spirit. It is not a contaminator of the soul but its precious and indispensable tenement. It is not to be despised or neglected but must be developed to the full and kept in fine fettle to serve the divine ends for which it has been given to man.

(4) As the Supreme Father and Mother of all creatures, God is greatly interested in their welfare. He blesses all their noble efforts and delights in their success.

(5) Man is not just froth and bubble on the ocean of life. As son of God, he is heir to God's wisdom and bliss, power and plenty, goodness and greatness. All the qualities of God are present in him, though in a dormant form. If he cultivates and exploits his divine heritage he can be prosperous where he is poor, wise where he is ignorant, strong where he is weak, and happy where he is miserable.

The actualisation of one's hidden powers in order to develop into a likeness of God is the real aim of human life. By realising his latent divine qualities, by living and working like God, man can become truly an image of God, and thus attain the highest perfection. To acquire similarity with the nature of God—this is the goal Sri Krishna has placed before mankind. He says:

> I shall again declare that supreme wisdom, of all wisdom the best, by knowing which all sages have passed from this world to the highest perfection. XIV/1
>
> Having resorted to this wisdom, they become of like nature to Me, and are not born at the time of creation, nor are they disturbed at the time of dissolution. XIV/2

It is not enough to know God, to see Him or even to love

Him; one must become like Him in character and work. "That liberation, that oneness," writes Sri Aurobindo, "that putting on of the divine nature, Sadharmya, it declares to be the very essence of spiritual freedom and the whole of immortality. The supreme importance attached to Sadharmya is a capital point in the teaching of the Gita". Dr. Radhakrishnan also emphasises this when he says: "Life eternal is not dissolution into the indefinable Absolute but attainment of a universality and freedom of spirit, which is lifted above the empirical movement... The saved soul grows into the likeness of the Divine and assumes an unchangeable being, eternally conscious of the Supreme Lord who assumes varied cosmic forms."

The rest of this chapter and most of what follows, specially Chapter XVI, are devoted to an exposition of the divine qualities whose acquisition in character and work leads to liberation. (XVI/5).

The Three Gunas

At the end of chapter III one aspect of life, namely sin, was explained as being due to desires arising in the hearts of men. The present chapter offers a comprehensive and generalised explanation not only of evil but also of goodness and of all mixtures of the two which are found in the world. The three Gunas or qualities—Sattva, Rajas and Tamas—which occur in nature are like the three colours out of which the whole picture of the universe of variegated colours has been painted.

Sattva is commonly translated as harmony, light or purity; Rajas as passion, motion or activity; and Tamas as dullness or inertia. These three strands make up the entire warp and woof of human nature. They are the chains which bind the human soul to the world.

This discourse gives the chief characteristics of these qualities of nature, their modes of expression and how they influence man's progress on earth. Sri Krishna says:

> The Nature-born qualities of Sattva, Rajas and Tamas firmly tie the imperishable soul to the body, O valiant Arjuna, XIV/5
> Of these Sattva being pure, causes illumination and health. It binds, O blameless one, by attachment to happiness and

by attachment to knowledge. XIV/6
Know Rajas, which is of the nature of passion, as born of craving and attachment. It binds the soul through attachment to actions and their fruits, O son of Kunti. XIV/7
But Tamas, the deluder of all embodied beings, is born of ignorance. It binds, O Bharata, by developing the qualities of negligence, indolence and sleep. XIV/8
Arjuna, Sattva urges one to happiness, and Rajas to action; while Tamas, clouding wisdom, urges one to error. XIV/9

Commenting on verse 6 Radhakrishnan writes: "Sattva does not rid us of the ego sense. It also causes desire, though for noble objects. The self which is free from all attachment is here attached to happiness and knowledge."

Sattva is the cause of all virtue, philanthropy, devotion, knowledge etc. Rajas produces inordinate desires, affection, lust, general attachment either to persons or things and a quickening of activity to accomplish personal ambition. Tamas makes body and intellect dull. It brings about infatuation, excessive fondness for sleep, indolence, habitual scepticism and an inclination to postpone action.

Now Harmony prevaileth, having overpowered Motion and Inertia, O Bharata; now Motion, having overpowered Harmony and Inertia; and now inertia, having overpowered Harmony and Motion. XIV/10

To quote Swami Chidbhavananda: "In his calm and serene wakeful state, man stays in Sattva which nourishes him in joy and wisdom. The preponderance of Rajas drives him into activity. But when overwhelmed with Tamas, man can neither learn nor work. He yields to lethargy and sleep. In the course of a day, all the three Gunas dominate by turns, over all beings". According to Satavalekar no activity is possible if all the Gunas are equally strong.

When in this body, as well as in the mind and senses, perspicuity and discernment make their appearance, then Sattva should be regarded as predominant. XIV/11
With the preponderance of Rajas, O chief of Bharatas, greed,

activity, undertaking of actions with a selfish motive, restlessness and a thirst for enjoyment make their appearance. XIV/12

With the growth of Tamas, Arjuna, obtuseness, inactivity, carelessness and stupor—all these appear in the mind and senses. XIV/13

When Sattva predominates the alterness and efficiency of the body, senses and the intellect are increased. Ascendancy of Rajas is indicated by a rise of greed, selfish activity, undertaking of ambitious plans for self-aggrandisement, longing for material beauty and sensuous pleasures. Preponderance of Tamas produces ignorance in the soul, love of orthodoxy, blind adherence to customs and traditions, lethargy, delusion, self-deception, vanity and want of faith.

If a person dies during the preponderance of Sattva, he obtains the faultless worlds (heaven etc.) gained by men of noble deeds. XIV/14

Dying when Rajas is in the ascendant, he is born among those attached to action; likewise expiring during the preponderance of Tamas, he is born in the wombs of stupid creatures. XIV/15

The next life will be more or less a continuation of the present one. Man should, therefore, try to cultivate a Sattvika mood in this life, or whatever remains of it.

It is said the fruit of Sattvika actions is good and faultless (in the shape of happiness, wisdom, dispassion etc.); the fruit of Rajas is sorrow and the fruit of Tamas, ignorance. XIV/16

Knowledge arises from Sattva and greed from Rajas; likewise error, stupor and ignorance arise from Tamas. XIV/17

Those who are fixed in Sattva go upwards; the Rajasikas remain in the middle; whole those of a Tamasik temperament go downwards. XIV/18

Swami Chidbhavananda explains: "Tamas engulfs man either in inertia or in wicked deeds which prevent him from making upward progress. Rajas is the one instrument to save man

from stagnation and lead him to prosperity. It drives him on to incessant action; but the nature of action is to bring misery in its train. And this misery is no ill luck. It has a great purpose to serve. Nothing else equals misery for inducing man to soar high. In the training ground of misery he gets his character shaped. Consequently dharma emanates from him. Ultimately dharma or good conduct lifts him to Sattva, which is all purity and brilliance."

Above the Three Gunas

An explanation of the three Gunas is followed by a reference to a state beyond the Gunas when the aspirant acquires the nature of God. Sri Krishna says:

> When the seer does not see any doer other than the three Gunas and knows Me who stands beyond these Gunas, he attains My nature. XIV/19
>
> Having transcended the three Gunas, which have produced the body, and freed from birth, death, old age and sorrow, he enjoys immortality. XIV/20

When the sage realises that his spirit is above these three attributes and that activity resides in them alone, he attains Godhead. The spirit in all persons, irrespective of their mood, is ever perfect, untainted and untaintable.

The Lord's reference to one who has crossed over the three Gunas led Arjuna to enquire about the marks of such a person. Sri Krishna replied:

> He, O Pandava, who does not hate light, activity and delusion when present, nor longs after them when absent. XIV/22
>
> He who sitting like a witness, is not moved by the Gunas, and who knowing that only the Gunas act, remains firmly established in God, and is never shaken from that state. XIV/23
>
> Balanced in pleasure and pain, self-reliant, to whom a lump of earth, a rock and gold are alike, the same among the pleasant and the unpleasant things; the same in censure and in praise. XIV/24
>
> The same in honour and ignominy, the same to friend and

foe, renouncing (dedicating) all undertakings (to God), he is said to have risen above the three qualities. XIV/25

He who serves Me with undivided devotion or love, rises above the three modes, he too is fit to become the Eternal. XIV/26

For I (as the Purushottama) am the abode of the Eternal, and of the indestructible nectar of immortality, of immemorial righteousness and of unending bliss. XIV/27

The person who has crossed beyond the three Gunas is their master and not their slave. He puts them to full use without being carried away by them. He becomes Jiwanmukta or liberated in this very life. In his inner self he sits unconcerned and is not disturbed by the operations of the three attributes, whether good, evil or neutral. The marks of a Jivanmukta are more or less the same as those of a sthitaprajna (II/55) and of a man of devotion (XII/13). It is obvious that the marks of perfection are the same, no matter in what way it is attained.

To quote Dr. Radhakrishnan, when a man has transcended the three Gunas "Sattva is sublimated into the light of consciousness, jyoti; rajas into austerity, tapas; and tamas into tranquillity or rest, shanti". This does not mean that he has abandoned work. On the contrary, realising that nothing exists except God, he serves God with unswerving devotion, sees God everywhere and in all beings and is ever engaged in doing good to all. Working like Purushottama such a person quickly becomes like Him, who is the abode of the imperishable, immutable Brahma, of everlasting Dharma and of unending bliss.

The man who has transcended the Gunas has not made them extinct. They still operate in him but under his sway. He does not destroy their powers but harnesses them to best advantage. He becomes a Jiwanmukta.

Acharya Vinoba has suggested the following rules for rising above the Gunas.

"The cure for Tamas is labour—bodily and mental. Work with your body. Be always alert. Let every action proceed from deep thought. Nothing should ever be done without thinking. Think before you act and think also after you act. Work hard and combine thought with all your actions.

"The Karma Yoga of the Gita is the 'Ramabana', the arrow

of Rama, for the destruction of Rajas. If a man does not scatter his energies in all sorts of efforts, but collects them and applies them in orderly fashion to a single task, only then can some good action take shape through his hands. Hence there is great value in Swadharma." By canalising one's powers in the performance of one's duty, by doing all work in a selfless spirit, by relinquishing attachment and the fruit of actions, Rajas is subdued.

"To conquer Sattva, conquer egoism first and then attachment. By constant practice of Sattva we should achieve victory over its egoism. Standing aloof and dedicating all fruits to the Lord, we should free ourselves from attachment to Sattva. Only then can we say that we have achieved victory over Sattva Guna." Sattva should become so natural, spontaneous and effortless for the aspirant that he becomes quite unconscious of its constant presence. Only then can he be said to have mastered Sattva.

This chapter completes the Gita's description of the ideal man designated elsewhere as a man of steady mind, a man of knowledge and a devotee. The Yogavasishtha, which may well be regarded as a commentary on the Gita and is recommended for study, describes a Jeevanmukta in the following words:

"Pleasures do not delight, pains do not distress him. Deep, violent and continued states of pleasure or pain do not produce in him the feeling of like or dislike. Although externally engaged in worldly actions, he has no attachment in his heart to any object whatsoever. His conduct does not annoy any body; he behaves like an ideal citizen and a friend of all. Outwardly he is very busy, but he is very calm and quiet at heart. He is free from the restrictions of caste, creed, station in life, custom and Scriptures. He rests undisturbed in the Supreme Bliss. He does not work for himself, as he is very happy and does not hang his joy on anything else. His face is always cheerful. He behaves with his fellow beings as the occasion demands, without the least stain on his mind. He plays like a child in the company of children; he is a youth among the young and he acts as an old man in the company of the aged. He is full of courage in a party of courageous people; and shares the misery of the miserable. There is nothing which he has to achieve. He, therefore, performs and gives up actions without much concern, like

a child. He never feels despondent, proud, agitated, cast down, troubled or elated. He is full of cleverness and magnanimity even when surrounded by enemies. He regards his activities as a part of the Cosmic movement and performs them without any personal desire. He never hankers after the pleasures that are not in his hand, but enjoys all those he has. The idea of "I" and "Mine", of something to be achieved and something to be avoided, has completely died within him. Even doing all sorts of actions, the liberated one is in samadhi. He is a great worker (mahakarta). He works without anxiety, egoistic feeling, pride or impurity of heart. He is a great enjoyer (mahabhokta). He does not discard the pleasures that he has got nor desires the pleasures that he has not got. He equally enjoys old age, death, misery, poverty and ruling over an empire. He does not make any of the natural functions of his body paralysed for want of proper exercise. His body is a kingdom unto him, over which he rules wisely and well. He keeps it healthy and does not starve it of the appropriate requirements. The life of the sage who has realised his Divinity is really the happiest life. From him goodness is scattered all round. Having seen him, having heard about him, having met with him, and having remembered him all creatures feel delighted. He has no longer any struggle for livelihood. The guardian angels of the world protect and support him, as they do the entire Cosmos." (*Yogavasishtha* by B. L. Atreya)

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Purushottama Yoga

Introductory

THOUGH ONE of the small chapters, it occupies a very important place in the Gita. It represents the climax or completion of Gita teaching and in its last stanza has been described by Sri Krishna himself as "most secret or profound".

> Thus, O Sinless one, has this most secret teaching been imparted by Me. Assimilating this, man becomes enlightened, O Bharata, and attains supreme satisfaction. XV/20

According to Acharya Vinoba, this Purushottama Yoga is the distilled essence of the infinite Vedas. In the words of Swami Chidbhavananda, though the whole of the Gita is a profound teaching, this chapter in particular is pronounced as profound because of the quintessence of Vedanta being enshrined in it.

In this chapter Sri Krishna explains briefly the nature of the world (Samsar) and how its bonds may be cut asunder by the powerful sword of non-attachment, that is by the renunciation

of self-ful desires and the fruit of action. The individual soul is only a portion of the universal soul, and the entire creation receives its energy and nourishment, its form and substance, from the Supreme Spirit. In the samsar there are three persons or aspects of God—Kshara or the manifest universe (which is perishable), Akshara or the unmanifest, unborn, actionless, absolute; and Purushottama, the Supreme Person, who is above them and includes both the manifest and unmanifest aspects of God, His active as well as inactive principle. Finally, Sri Krishna declares, man may reach God by worshipping and serving Him in all ways and with his whole heart. "Weave all the actions of your life", says Acharya Vinoba, "with the warp and woof of Bhakti and Jnana. This is what is called Purushottama Yoga."

The Nature of Creation

The first verse gives an allegorical description of Samsar (Universe or creation):

Men call the Ashwattha, the Banyan tree,
Which hath its boughs beneath, its roots above,
The ever-holy tree. Yea! for its leaves
Are green and waving hymns which whisper truth!
Who knows the Ashwattha, knows Vedas and all. XV/1

Here the universe has been likened to an inverted Peepal tree whose roots—the Supreme Spirit—are above, whose branches spread out below and whose leaves are the hymns of the Vedas.

The source of all creation is God who is higher than the highest thing in creation. The roots of the tree of Samsar are, therefore, said to be above the branches and the leaves of the Samsar tree. The leaves denote all the various beings and objects in creation; they have all sprung from the God on high and derive sustenance from Him. Like hymns of the Vedas they are all singing the glories of the Lord and pointing the way to a higher destiny. The world is nourished by true knowledge and action as taught in the Vedas, just as a tree receives nourishment through its foliage. According to Hindu mythology the banyan tree is sacred. By comparing the Samsar with this tree it

is intended to emphasise the sacred nature of the world. The entire universe, having originated from God, is holy; every atom in it is the abode of God.

As a matter of fact, the world is not what it seems to be; its real nature is very difficult to understand (XV/3). The true Veda knower is he who knows the truth about Samsar and its contradictions, namely that:

(1) The world is only an emanation from God or a concrete form or embodiment of His Spirit. He pervades all things, inspires all life and prompts all activity. The world is in reality auspicious and holy, though at times it appears as a snare. The confusion arises because though God is present everywhere and in all things. He has concealed Himself from human perception through the various charms and attractions of the world.

(2) Though everything in the world is evanescent, the world goes on for ever. It is without beginning or end; it shares with God the property of eternal existence.

(3) At times the world appears as a vale of tears, but it is essentially a place of joy and bliss, having sprung from God, the Supreme Bliss. The pleasures one gets occasionally in life are merely a reflection of the joy that is God.

The Samsar tree is very attractive. Its shade is cool and restful; its foliage charming; its flowers beautiful and fragrant; and its fruit, sweet and delicious. In other words, the world offers pleasures and conveniences of many kinds, which may turn out to be either means or obstacles to a man's spiritual progress. according as they are used properly or abused.

The thick foliage and interwining branches of the cosmic tree effectively hide from the creatures living there a view of the roots above and bar their way upward to the Supreme Source. To facilitate the ascent it is necessary to chop off the obstructing branches and this, says Sri Krishna, can be done not by renouncing the world or its activities, but by applying the powerful axe of non-attachment.

The Axe of Non-Attachment

Its form is not perceived here as such, neither its end, nor its origin, nor its existence. Having cut asunder this firm

rooted Ashwattha with the strong axe of non-attachment; XV/3

That goal should be sought for, going whither they do not return again. I seek refuge in that Primeval Purusha whence streamed forth the Eternal activity (Pravritti). XV/4

Free from pride and delusion, with the evil of attachment conquered, ever dwelling in the Self, their desires completely stilled, liberated from the pairs of opposites known as pleasure and pain, the undeluded reach the Goal Eternal. XV/5

The advice to cut down the tree of Samsar should not be taken literally. It does not mean that the world should be destroyed. Such a course of action is neither possible nor desirable. Nor is it necessary or advisable to make the world barren of its beauties and joys. To become spiritual one need not be a kill-joy or a weeping philosopher. As a matter of fact the Gita has repeatedly called upon the disciple to work unceasingly, not merely to keep the world going but also to make it a better and happier place to live in. Instead of trying to escape from the world the aspirant is advised to live a full life, utilising all his energy and time to promote the common weal. The axe of non-attachment is a psychological weapon; its use to cut the tree of Samsar is not a physical or outward act but an inner transformation, a change in the mental attitude or in the habitual ways of looking at things. What the aspirant is required to do is to cut the bonds of worldliness, the hankering for the pleasures of the world, the self-ful desires which tie him down to the earth. He whose mind is unattached would live in the world like a lotus in water, untainted by the surroundings, working ceaselessly but in a selfless spirit and sharing the fruits of his labour with those who need them. His senses would move among the objects of sense and even enjoy them (II/64) but without falling a victim to their attractive or repulsive power. The reader will recall that the subject of non-attachment has already been discussed in detail in Chapter III.

The fifth stanza is also very important. It sums up in a nutshell the main teachings of the Gita. It not only suggests the directions in which the aspirant should strive to improve

himself but also a yard-stick to measure his progress from time to time. The reader will note the expression 'adhyatma-nitya' which means living in constant union with God. A disciple of Sri Krishna would not be satisfied with brief moments of communion or partial union with God, helpful though they are, but would endeavour to remain in touch with Him at all times and with his whole being.

God and the Universe

The relationship between God and the Universe, between Spirit and Matter was first touched upon in verses 4 to 12 of the seventh chapter. This topic is brought to a conclusion in the present chapter.

The relationship between the individual soul and the universal soul is explained in stanzas 7 to 9.

> A portion of Mine own Self, transformed in the world of life into an immortal spirit, draweth round itself the senses of which the mind is the sixth, veiled in matter. XV/7
> When the soul acquireth a body and when he abandoneth it, he seizeth these and goes with them, as the wind takes fragrances from their retreats. XV/8
> Enshrined in the ear, the eye, the touch, the taste and the smell and in the mind also, he enjoyeth the objects of the senses. XV/9

The Jivatma is a portion of God, immortal like God but smaller in every respect. In all the activities of man it is God who is the real actor. In fact, God is the motive power behind all life and activity in the universe.

> That splendour issuing from the sun that enlighteneth the whole world, that which is in the moon and in fire, that splendour know as from Me. XV/12
> Permeating the earth I support all beings by my power, and having become the delicious Soma, I nourish all plants. XV/13
> Becoming the fire which dwells in the bodies of living beings and uniting with the Prana and Apana breaths, I digest the

XV/14
four kinds of food.
And I am seated in the hearts of all; and from Me emanates
memory, wisdom and the reasoning faculty. And that which
is to be known in all the Vedas am I, and I indeed the Veda XV/15
knower and the Vedanta.

The reader will note how the existence of God is brought out in these verses successively in the mineral, plant and animal kingdoms and in human life, representing an ascending order of evolution.

The description of God given in these stanzas is necessarily fragmentary and illustrative. What is emphasised here is that God is the active principle in creation. From Him have originated all the forms in the world, and it is His energy which appears as heat, light and life, thought and feeling, memory and wisdom, movement and effort. Seated in the hearts and intellects of human beings, He impels all their activities from highest to lowest. He is knowledge as well as the knower. He inspires not only spiritual but also temporal activities like art and literature, science and technology, exploration and adventure, trade and commerce, government and defence. God not only motivates all activity but also enjoys it. (XV/9).

Since God is present in all things and in all activities, it is not necessary to go very far in search of Him!

The Three Aspects of Godhead

In Chapter VIII (verses 18 to 22) it was explained that God, the Supreme Person, has two aspects—namely the lower and the higher unmanifest, that is the absolute and the supreme person. Here the same idea is expressed in a different way:

There are two persons in this world, Kshara (Perishable)
and Akshara (Imperishable); the Kshara is all these exis-
tences and the unchanging (Kutastha) is the imperishable XV/16
(Akshara).
But other than these is the highest spirit, Purushottama, the
Supreme Self, who, as the undying Lord, pervades the three
worlds and sustains them. XV/17

As I transcend the Perishable (Kshara) and am even above the Imperishable (Akshara), therefore I am known in the world and in the Veda as the Purushottama, the Highest Purusha. XV/18

These verses bring out three aspects of God, namely Kshara, Akshara and Purushottama.

Many commentators have explained Kshara as matter or creation, which is perishable; Akshara as the Individual souls which are imperishable; and Purushottama as the Supreme Lord who includes Kshara as well as Akshara and is superior to both. But following Sri Aurobindo, Swami Ramdas and some other commentators, it is instructive to explain Kshara as Maya, Prakriti or the manifest creation, whether moving or unmoving; Akshara as the opposite of Kshara, that is the unmanifest, actionless, impersonal Purusha, the Atmic Principle, who does nothing and only sits aloof as a silent witness; while Purushottama, the Supreme Lord, includes both Kshara and Akshara, Purusha and Prakriti, the manifest as well as unmanifest, the Absolute as well as relative, the actionless as well as the ever active, and is therefore greater than each and both of them. Sri Aurobindo writes: "This duality of Self and Nature, quiescent Purusha, active Prakriti, is not, however, the whole of our being.... It (the Gita) goes beyond them to the supreme all-embracing oneness of a higher Purusha, Purushottama. The Gita affirms that there is a supreme Mystery, a highest Reality that upholds and reconciles the truth of these two different manifestations. There is an utmost Supreme Self, Lord and Brahman, one who is both the impersonal and the personal, but other and greater than either of them and other and greater than both of them together. He is Purusha, Self and soul of our being, but he is also Prakriti;... All here is this Divine, this Godhead, Vasudeva; for by Nature and the soul in nature he becomes all that is and everything proceeds from him and lives in or by him, though he himself is greater than any widest manifestation, any deepest spirit, any cosmic figure."

The main difference between the popular view and that of Sri Aurobindo is that according to the former the Supreme God is absolute and quiescent and so to grow into His like-

ness the aspirant has to renounce the world and resort to quiescence. On the other hand, according to Sri Aurobindo, the actionless, unmanifest and eternal Spirit, even if it is greater than the manifest and perishable creation, is much smaller than the Supreme Lord, Vasudeva, who is all, who combines in himself the two opposite qualities of quiescence and activity, who is both personal and impersonal, infinite and infinitesimal, perfect and imperfect. Those who pursue matter, nature or manifest creation alone are groping in the dark, but even more so are those who neglect the world and devote themselves exclusively to the attainment of the unmanifest and impersonal God. The ideal and true goal of mankind is the Purushottama, who is not only formless and unborn but also manifest in an infinite variety of forms; who is not only rapt in meditation and tapasya but also engages in countless ways of activity as the Creator and Controller of the Universe.

Shri Aurobindo's interpretation is in accordance with the main trend of the teaching of the Gita. Sri Krishna has consistently and repeatedly stressed the active aspect of the Supreme Godhead, for example in verses VIII/18 to 22, and he removes all possible doubt when he says in verse XV/4:

"I take refuge in that Primeval Man from whom this ancient creative energy (Pravritti) forthstreamed."

The aspirant should also turn to the Purushottama and take Him as the model for all his Sadhana. He should make his life a happy blend of quiescence and activity: quiescence, peace and serenity within, in the heart, mind and soul; activity, skilful, enthusiastic and energetic without, in the workaday world.

Swami Ram Das has expressed the same views in his *Gita Sandesh*. He says: "God is not merely a silent and immovable spirit but is also the active Master and Ruler of His universal Manifestation. To be in tune with God in the infinite silence and immobility of His existence and still be working in the world for its welfare and uplift through His Shakti, which animates and activates His Prakriti, is the real condition of a perfect yogi."

Practical Applications

Having explained the three aspects of God, Sri Krishna calls upon mankind to put this knowledge into practice. He says:

> He who, undeluded, knows Me as Purushottama, the Highest Self, he knows all, O Bharata, and he worships Me with all his heart. XV/19

Knowledge can be fruitful only when translated into action. Therefore the call goes out to the aspirant to worship God with all his heart. The words actually used in the Sanskrit text are 'Bhajatimam Sarvabhavena'.

It is customary to translate the word *bhajati* or *bhajan* as 'worship', the latter being taken in its usual sense and limited to formal acts of prayer, pooja, japa etc. Even in this narrow sense love or adoration cannot be complete unless accompanied by service. As a matter of fact, according to Satavalekar and some other commentators, as already explained, the word bhajan and its derivative bhakti actually mean 'to serve' and 'service' respectively.

The other important word in this stanza is Sarva Bhavena, which is generally translated as "with one's whole heart or soul or being" or "in every way of his nature". Satavalekar, however, has given a different but very interesting and useful interpretation of this phrase. According to him it means "in a spirit of wholeness, or with the knowledge that God is all."

On the basis of Satavalekar's interpretation, the 19th verse would read as follows: "He who undeluded, knows Me as Purushottama, the highest Self, he knows all, O Bharata, and he serves Me knowing full well that I am all."

Since God is all, it follows that he can be conveniently served by serving His creatures. It is not necessary to quit the world or to look for Him in some remote heaven or a secret corner of the heart. Moreover, since He is all and in all, service of any part of His creation will be tantamount to His service. In other words, the smallest acts of service in the world are acts of His worship provided they are carried out in the correct spirit and without hurting others.

Since the aspirant is required to turn to the Primal Lord of

Pravritti and worship the Purushottama, it is obvious that he must seek inspiration from Him and work as He works—untiringly, efficientlv, purposefully but for the good of the world and not with any selt-tul desire or motive of his own.

To bring home the lessons of Purushottama Yoga I will conclude this chapter with quotations from some modern thinkers. Thus Dr. Radhakrishnan says: "The man of the world is lost in the varied activities of the world. He throws himself into the mutable world (Kshara). The quietist withdraws into the silence of the Absolute (Akshara), but the ideal man of the Gita goes beyond these two extremes and works like Purushottama who reconciles all possibilities in the world without getting involved in it. He is the doer of works, yet is not the doer, Kartaram Akartaram. The Lord is the pattern of an unwearied and active worker who does not, by His work, forfeit His integrity of spirit. The liberated soul is eternally free like Krishna and Janaka. Janaka carried on his duties and was not perturbed by the events of the world. The freed souls work for the guidance of men who follow the standards set by the thoughtful. They live in the world but as strangers. They endure all hardships in the flesh and yet they live not after the flesh. Their existence is on earth but their citizenship is in heaven. 'As the unlearned act from attachment to their work, so should the learned also act but without any attachment, with the desire to maintain world order'."

According to Acharya Vinoba the supreme truth is revealed in the fifteenth chapter. The whole essence of the Vedas is this Purushottama Yoga and the essence of all the Vedas is in the palm of your hands. "All the Vedas", he says, "are in that palm and they say, 'Serve'. Consider whether your hands worked yesterday, whether they are fit to work again today and whether they carry the marks of service. When the hands are worn out with service, then the destiny that Brahma ordained for you becomes clear. This is the meaning of "Looking at one's palm in the morning".... The truth is, the essence of the Vedas is in our hands. We have to build our lives on the foundations of service, love and knowledge. This is what is meant by saying that the Vedas are in our hands."

God permeates the world through and through. Therefore

the best and most convenient way to worship Him is not to practise meditation or japa alone but to serve His creatures lovingly and thoughtfully; to join head, heart and hands in the service of His creation. This is the crux of Purushottama Yoga.

16

Divine and Demoniacal Properties

Introductory

ACCORDING TO popular belief, knowledge of God or a vision of God is the high water mark of spiritual progress. As already explained, the Gita puts its own interpretation on the terms knowledge (XIII/7 to 11) and vision of God (VI/30, XIII/27), but in addition insists on Sadharmya or becoming a likeness of God (XIV/2) in thought, word and deed as well as in personal qualities. The descriptions of a Sthitaprajna, Bhakta, Jnani and Gunatita are all intended to stress the importance and show the way of divinising the entire life and personality of the aspirant. The present chapter presents the same theme in a different way. It makes a broad division of human qualities into two, namely divine and demoniacal. Divine properties make for liberation and demoniacal properties for bondage (XVI/5). Goodness and nobility of character are the *sine qua non* of spiritual life. No one can be godly without first being good.

Divine Properties

The divine properties are briefly enumerated in the first three verses:

> Fearlessness, purity of heart, steadfastness in knowledge and Yoga, alms-giving, control of the senses, sacrifice (yajna), study of the scriptures, austerity and straightforwardness. XV I/1
>
> Non-injury, truth, absence of anger, renunciation (Tyaga), serenity, absence of crookedness, compassion to living beings, uncovetousness, gentleness, modesty, absence of fickleness. XV I/2
>
> Vigour, forgiveness, fortitude, purity, absence of hatred and humility — these belong to him who is born with divine properties, O Bharata. XV I/3

Fearlessness heads the list and humility guards the rear of the godly qualities. Explaining the significance of these positions Vinobaji writes:

"Within us there are good qualities on one side and bad ones on the other. And both armies are well arranged. An army needs a commander. The good qualities have their own commander namely, Abhaya, fearlessness. Fearlessness has been given the first place in this chapter. This is not a mere accident, but deliberate. Without truth good qualities have no value; but then for truth fearlessness is essential. In an atmosphere charged with fear, good qualities cannot grow; in fact they become themselves bad qualities, and good efforts and tendencies get weakened. Fearlessness is the commander of all good qualities; but the army has to be watched front and rear, and on both sides. The direct attack will, of course, be in front, but one may also be stealthily set upon from behind. While in front Fearlessness stands alert, Humility guards the rear. This is an excellent arrangement. Here twentysix qualities are enumerated. If we have twenty-five of these qualities, but have ahamkara, egoism or pride in these, there is every chance of stealthy attack from behind in which we shall lose all we have now. That is why the virtue called Humility is stationed in the rear. In the absence of Humility there is no knowing when victory will turn

into defeat. Thus by placing Fearlessness in front and Humility in the rear we can develop all the good qualities."

Fearlessness needs a firm foundation of strength—moral, intellectual and physical. Nothing can promote fearlessness better than right living, right actions, a clear conscience and trust in God.

Purity is to be acquired not so much by baths, change of clothes and personal hygiene as by entertaining noble thoughts and, above all, by engaging in actions which are pure and altruistic. The most important factor in purity is the purity of the means of livelihood.

For a discussion of the different kinds of alms verses 20 to 22 of Chapter XVII may be seen. Renunciation—specially renunciation of the fruit of actions—is a recurring theme of the Gita. Renunciation of the fruit of one's actions, with alms-giving as its main component, is the best of Sadhanas and quickly leads to peace (XII/12).

The meaning of sacrifice or Yajna has already been explained in Chapter III and IV.

The various kinds and grades of austerity are detailed in Chapter XVII.

Speech should not only be truthful but also pleasant and beneficial (XVII/15). Even good advice must be tendered in agreeable words, if it is to be effective. Frankness is no excuse for being blunt or rude. Truth which is harmful is better left unsaid.

Explaining divine properties Sri Aurobindo writes: "The Deva nature is distinguished by an acme of sattvica habits and qualities; self control, sacrifice, the religious habit, cleanness and purity, candour and straightforwardness, truth, calm and self-denial, compassion to all beings, modesty, gentleness, forgiveness, patience, steadfastness, a deep, sweet and serious freedom from all restlessness, levity and inconstancy are its native attributes. The Asuric qualities, wrath, greed, cunning, treachery, wilful doing of injury to others, pride and arrogance and excessive self-esteem have no place in its composition. But its gentleness and self denial and self control are free too from all weakness: it has energy and soul-force, strong resolution, the fearlessness of the soul that lives in the right and according to the truth as well as its harmlessness, tejah, abhayam, dhritih,

ahimsa, satyam. The whole being, the whole temperament is integrally pure; there is a seeking for knowledge and a calm and fixed abiding in knowledge. This is the wealth, the plenitude of the man born into the Deva nature."

Demoniacal Properties

Hypocrisy, arrogance, conceit, anger, harshness and ignorance are the qualities of one who is born with demoniacal nature. XVI/4

The demoniac know not what to do and what to refrain from; neither purity, nor right conduct nor truth is found in them. XVI/7

They say, "The world is unreal, without a moral basis, without a God, born of mutual union, brought about by lust. What else?" XVI/8

Holding this view, these ruined selves of small understanding, of fierce deeds, rise as enemies of the world for its destruction. XVI/9

Filled with insatiable desires, full of hypocrisy, pride and arrogance, holding evil ideas through delusion, they work with impure resolves. XVI/10

Giving themselves over to endless cares terminating only with death, regarding enjoyment of (sensual) pleasures as the highest (aim) and feeling sure that that is all; XVI/11

Bound by a hundred ties of expectation, given over to lust and anger, they strive to obtain by unlawful means hoards of wealth for sensual enjoyment. XVI/12

"This has been gained by me today; that ambition I shall realise now; this wealth is mine already; that will be mine again (in future) XVI/13

"I have slain this enemy and others also I shall slay. I am a lord, I am enjoyer, I am perfect, powerful, happy; XVI/14

"I am wealthy, well-born. Who is there like me? I will perform sacrifices. I will give alms. I will rejoice." Thus deluded by ignorance, XVI/15

Bewildered by numerous thoughts, enmeshed in the snare of delusion, addicted to the gratification of sensuous desires, they fall into a foul hell. XVI/16

Self glorifying, stubborn, filled with the pride and intoxica-

tion of wealth, they perform sacrifices only for show, contrary to scriptural ordinance. XVI/17

Given over to egoism, power, insolence, lust and wrath, these malicious persons hate me (residing) in their own bodies and those of others. XVI/18

These haters, evil, cruel and vilest among men, I repeatedly throw into demoniacal wombs in this world. XVI/19

Entering into demoniacal wombs, these deluded ones, in birth after birth, without attaining Me, O Arjuna, they sink into still lower depths. XVI/20

Triple is the gate of this hell, destructive of the self—desire, anger and greed; therefore let man renounce these three. XVI/21

A man released from these three gates of hell, O Arjuna, works his own salvation and thereby reaches the highest goal. XVI/22

The man of demoniacal nature knows no God except his own petty self. He knows no law except that of self aggrandisement, self glorification and self inflation. His world is limited to his body and those who directly or indirectly subserve it. His exclusive pursuit of selfish ends might not have been so harmful, and in fact might even have done some good to society, but for the fact that being a person of small understanding (XVI/9) and fiendish propensities, he takes delight in fierce deeds and sets himself up as the conqueror of the world. He loses no opportunity of hurting and humiliating others. He is relentless and unscrupulous in amassing wealth and in liquidating those whom he regards as his enemies. He is a curse, instead of a blessing, to the society in which he lives. By his wantonly cruel deeds he hurts the Lord residing in himself and in others. He makes others small in order to make himself big. He makes others poor in order to make himself rich. He is caught up in a vicious circle. His evil thoughts and deeds further darken his limited intelligence: with loss of intelligence his demoralisation and degradation proceed apace and he becomes more and still more bound to earth.

Giving the gist of demoniacal properties Sri Aurobindo writes: "The Asuric men . . . follow the cult of Desire and Ego. . . . Bound by a hundred bonds, devoured by wrath and lust,

unweariedly occupied in amassing unjust gains which may serve their enjoyment and the satisfaction of their craving, always they think, "To-day I have gained this object of desire, tomorrow I shall have that other; today I have so much wealth, more I will get tomorrow. I have killed this, my enemy, the rest too I will kill, I am a lord and king of men; I am perfectly accomplished, strong, happy, fortunate, a privileged enjoyer of the world; I am wealthy, I am of higher birth; who is there like unto me? I will sacrifice, I will give, I will enjoy." Thus occupied by many egoistic ideas, deluded, doing works but doing them wrongly, acting mightily but for themselves, for desire, for enjoyment, not for God in themselves and God in man, they fall into the unclean hell of their own evil. They sacrifice and give, but from a self-regarding ostentation, from vanity and with a stiff and foolish pride. In the egoism of their strength and power, in the violence of their wrath and arrogance they hate, despise and belittle the God hidden in themselves and the God in man. And because they have this proud hatred and contempt of good and of God, because they are cruel and evil, the Divine casts them down continually into more and more Asuric births. Not seeking him, they find him not, and at last, losing the way to him altogether, sink down into the lowest status of soul nature, adhamam gatim.

Conclusion

From this description of good and evil persons it should not be concluded that some men are wholly good, others wholly bad. In actual life, each person is a complex mixture of good and evil qualities in varying proportions; with a preponderance of good qualities in some and of evil qualities in others. Not only are good and evil inextricably mixed up but at times a good man may act viciously, while a bad man may rise to spectacular heights of nobility. Further, what is a virtue in a given set of circumstances may well become a vice in a different set of circumstances. Thus you cannot wage a righteous war with a cruel and unprincipled invader using only the weapons of truth, non-injury and straightforwardness. You are bound to fail as an officer or manager of an organisation if you do not know how to tick off erring employees or punish those

who practise or spread indiscipline.

Desire, anger and greed have their place in life, and even if it were possible to abolish them altogether it would not be advisable to do so. Their proper use is one of the essential arts that every one who is not a recluse, has to master. When to forgive, when to punish, when to be lenient, when to be strict, when to be kind and when to use force, when to be greedy and when to be generous, are tricky things which can only be learnt in the hard school of experience. The wise man, however, learns not only from his own experience, which is often dearly bought, but also from the experience of others which can be had for a song. This accumulated practical wisdom of mankind is contained in the scriptures and therefore the Gita, in winding up the discussion on good and evil qualities, calls upon the aspirant not to be guided solely by abstract principles but to apply them intelligently in the light of the detailed instructions and concrete examples given in the scriptures:

> He who having cast aside the injunctions of the scriptures, acts on the impulse of desire, attains not perfection, nor the highest goal, nor even happiness. XVI/23
>
> Therefore let the scripture be your authority in determining what ought to be done and what ought not to be done. Knowing this, you should do here only such action as is sanctioned by scriptural ordinance. XVI/24

There are many occasions in life when it is justified and even necessary to get angry or at least make a show of being angry. Anger repressed on such occasions is liable to burst forth later on in situations when it is hardly justified. Depending on circumstances anger, falsehood and force may all become indispensable. Conversely, kindness shown to evil doers or the enemies of the country may well turn out to be a disservice to many for the sake of the few. Similarly many good deeds may lose much of their merit, and may even become sinful, if performed for wrong motives or on wrong occasions. This is explained more fully in the next chapter.

Comparison of good and evil persons has been a favourite theme with Indian thinkers. What distinguishes the two classes more than anything else is that the former rejoices in doing

good, the latter in doing harm, to others. Thus Tulsidas says: "The conduct of saintly and wicked persons is analogous to that of sandalwood and the axe. The axe cuts down a sandal tree, while the latter perfumes the axe by imparting its own virtue (fragrance) to it. Saints as a rule have no hankering for the pleasures of sense and are the very mines of amiability and other virtues. They grieve to see others in distress and rejoice at the sight of others' joy. They are even-minded and look upon none as their enemy. Free from vanity and passion, they are conquerors of greed, anger and fear. Giving honour to all, they are modest themselves.... The wicked, on the other hand, are hostile without purpose even to the friendly; others' loss is their own gain. They delight in others' desolation and wail over their prosperity. In splendour they emulate the god of fire and in anger they vie with the god of death. They are rich in crime and vice. Their advancement augurs ill for others' interest; their decline alone is propitious for the world. They lay down their very life in order to be able to harm others.... There is no virtue like doing good to others and no evil like oppressing others."

The reader will observe that the Gita's enumeration of demoniacal qualities has emphasised the case of the typical successful person in high position, who wields much power and even enjoys great respect and popularity in his time, and yet is found in the final stock-taking to have been only an evil genius on account of his autocratic ways, his unbridled ambition and utter disregard for the rights, interests and feelings of others.

17



The Yoga of the Three-Fold Path

Introductory

A RECITAL of the qualities which a man should cultivate in order to grow into a likeness of God is a recurring theme of the Gita. The fourteenth discourse is devoted largely and the sixteenth exclusively to this topic. The present chapter continues the theme and explains how the spiritual merit of any action varies with its motive and mode of performance and other attendant circumstances. This knowledge is usually found in the shastras, that is the accumulated moral wisdom of mankind. In fact, at the end of the sixteenth chapter Sri Krishna advised Arjuna not to be led away by the promptings of his desire and instinct but to follow the scriptures in determining what ought to be done and what ought not to be done. But to glean the requisite knowledge from the scriptures is a long and laborious process and in doing so a novice may easily miss the wood for the trees. Therefore this chapter opens with a direct question from Arjuna, in reply to which Sri Krishna gives the essence of this knowledge in a few words.

Faith

The innate faith of men is of three kinds—Sattvic, Rajasic and Tamasic. Hear now about it. XVII/2

Arjuna, the faith of each is in accordance with his natural disposition. Man is of the nature of his faith. What his faith is, that verily, he is. XVII/3

Men of a Sattvic nature worship the gods; those of a Rajasic disposition worship Yakshas and Rakshasas; while those of a Tamasic disposition worship spirits and ghosts. XVII/4

Men who practise severe austerities not enjoined by the scriptures, given to hypocrisy and egoism, impelled by the force of desire and attachment. XVII/5

Fools that they are, they torture their bodily organs and Me too who dwells within the body—know that they are demoniacal in their resolve. XVII/6

These verses are largely self-explanatory. But some clarification may be given about the word faith itself. Faith, as distinct from reason or imagination, means belief or confidence. It denotes what a man believes in regard to things which are unknown, unpredictable and beyond the reach of reason—for example nature of God and soul, life after death, the destiny of man, future events in general—specially religious beliefs. A man's faith is a part of his nature. Faith colours his thoughts, aspirations and actions. A man of faith has a positive attitude towards life; he has confidence in himself, in his friends and in God. Faith in God has a strong influence on a man's entire life. He feels that he is not alone in the world but the good God is his friend and protector. He turns frequently to the Lord for help and guidance. He lives on faith in region inaccessible to reason.

Swami Chidbhavananda explains: "A stone soars up in the sky to the extent momentum is imparted to it. A tree grows up in tune with its inherent vitality. A lotus shoots up along with the rise in the level of the water in the pond. Similarly, man rises in his worth and attainments corresponding to the Shraddha (faith) with which he is endowed. He is nothing more and nothing less than what his Shraddha is."

Food

The food also that is dear to all is of three kinds. So are the sacrifices, austerities and gifts. Hear now of the classification of these. XVII/7

The foods that augment vitality, intelligence, vigour, health, joy and cheerfulness, which are savoury and bland, nourishing and agreeable, are dear to the Sattvic type of men. XVII/8

The foods that are bitter, sour, saline over-hot, pungent, dry and burning are liked by the Rajasic, and are productive of pain, grief and disease. XVII/9

Food which is half-cooked, tasteless, putrid, stale or left over and also impure, is dear to the Tamasic type of men. XVII/10

The meaning of these verses is fairly clear. They lay down broad principles and not hard and fast rules. Their application would depend on local conditions and food habits. Out of a large variety of food articles available, the aspirant should choose those which fall under the category of Sattvic (XVII/8). It should also be remembered that the quality of food cannot be better than that of the means of livelihood which have procured it.

Sri Krishna Prem comments: "Since the body is built up of the food that is taken into it and since also the taste of food forms an important and regular portion of our sense life, it is obvious that both the quality and taste of food will have a significance for him who is trying to follow the path—though by no means the excessive significance that is sometimes attached to it in India. No amount of merely Sattvic eating will suffice to make a man spiritual."

Sacrifice

The sacrifice which is offered, as enjoined by scriptural ordinance by men having no desire for fruit, under the firm belief that it is a duty which must be performed, is the Sattvic type of sacrifice. XVII/11

The sacrifice, however, which is offered with a view to fruit and also for the sake of ostentation, know it to be Rajasic,

Arjuna. XVII/12
They declare that sacrifice to be Tamasic which is contrary to the ordinances, in which no food is distributed, which is devoid of mantras, gifts and faith. XVII/13

The significance of sacrifice has already been explained in the third and fourth discourses. In the verses quoted above it has been pointed out that the spiritual merit of any sacrifice may naturally fall under three grades. Commenting on these verses, Sri Krishna Prem writes: "The sacrifice (Yajna) which the Gita mentions next must not be limited to the ceremonial sacrifices of ancient India. The Yajna of the Gita means sacrificial action in general, the dedication of one's goods and deeds and self to the service of the Life in all. The Sattvic man will do this not out of any desire for personal reward, even in the shape of his own salvation, but because his Sattvic nature reflects the knowledge of the Cosmic sacrifice and impels him to participate therein."

Austerity

The worship of gods, Brahmanas, elders and the wise; purity, straightforwardness, continence and non-violence—these are called austerity of the body. XVII/14
Speech which is inoffensive, truthful, pleasant and beneficial, practice of study of the sacred texts and Japa of the Divine name, these are called austerity of speech. XVII/15
Cheerfulness of mind, serenity, silence, self-control and purity of heart—these are called austerity of the mind. XVII/16
This threefold penance performed with supreme faith by Yogis having no desire for fruit is said to be Sattvica. XVII/17
The austerity which is practised with the object of gaining respect, honour and reverence, and for ostentation, is said to be Rajasic; it is unstable and transitory. XVII/18
The penance done under a deluded understanding, with torture to the mind, senses and body, or with the object of causing injury to another, is said to be Tamasic. XVII/19

In these verses Sri Krishna has propounded a concept of austerity which is free from ritualism and necessary for all

humanity. Austerity, according to him, means training of the body, speech and mind. It does not mean, to quote Sri Krishna Prem, "standing on one leg in a forest, nor piercing the body with sharp spikes.... Discipline of the body is quite a different thing from its injury by such practices. The body is the field in which we have to work and later will be needed for the service of the One. To weaken or destroy it by injudicious austerities is to destroy a valuable instrument.... The true attitude to one's body should be to treat it as one treats a riding horse, something to be intelligently disciplined, adequately cared for and properly used, and not as something either to be allowed to wander off at its free-will or else to be beaten to death or uselessness."

Speech must not only be truthful but also pleasant and beneficial. Even things meant for the good of the hearer must be said in a pleasant and inoffensive way.

The reader will also notice that cheerfulness heads the list of austerities of the mind. A disciple of Sri Krishna is not a gloomy person cursing the world and the day he was bron. He has a joyous heart and a radiant smile.

Alms

The gift which is made to one who does nothing in return.
with the idea that it is one's duty to give, and with due regard
to suitability of the place, time and recipient of the gift, is XVII/20
said to be Sattvic.
But what is given not cheerfully or out of ill gotten wealth,
with the hope of getting a return, or for some other reward— XVII/21
that gift is known to be Rajasic.
The gift which is made at an improper place and time, in an
insulting or disrespectful manner, to undeserving persons, is XVII/22
said to be Tamasic.

In this chapter are given yard sticks by which an aspirant may make a qualitative appraisal of his typical actions and avoid the common errors which may mar his progress. The highest grades of sacrifices and gifts are those made out of honestly earned wealth, in a spirit of humility and service and for motives which are selfless and altruistic. The real object of

both Yajna and Dana should be self-giving and not self-aggrandisement or self-glorification. The spiritual value of such deeds does not depend on the amount spent on them but on the degree of self-denial they have entailed and how lovingly they have been performed. Self-display and publicity detract from their merit instead of enhancing it.

18

The Yoga of Liberation by Renunciation

True Renunciation

THIS LAST CHAPTER of the Gita rounds off the theme of threefold path introduced in the previous chapter and sums up the teachings of the Gita. As its title indicates, it has devoted considerable space to an elucidation of the techniques of renunciation. As explained earlier (V/3, VI/1, 2), the Gita has called upon every one to throw himself into action and still practise renunciation:

> Work hard and efficiently, subordinating your personal good to the general good. III/9
> Produce in abundance in order to give away. II/47
> Acquire knowledge, power, wealth, piety and virtue—but use them all for the good of humanity. V/25, XII/4
> Develop your faculties to the utmost and thereby make yourself a superb manifestation and servant of God. X

The basic principles of renunciation are stated in the following verses:

Acts of sacrifice, gift and austerity should not be relinquished; they must be performed at all events. Sacrifice, gift and austerity are purifiers of the wise. XVIII/5

These acts of sacrifice, gift and austerity and all other duties must be performed leaving aside attachment and fruit. This is my considered and best opinion. XVIII/6

Renunciation of actions that are prescribed is not proper; the renunciation thereof from delusion is said to be of darkness (Tamas). XVIII/7

He who relinquishes an action from fear of physical suffering, saying that all action is troublesome, performs Rajasic form of relinquishment, and does not get the fruit of relinquishment at all. XVIII/8

An action enjoined by the scriptures, which is done as a duty, giving up attachment and fruit, that alone is regarded as a Sattvic form of relinquishment. XVIII/9

He who neither hates action, which does not lead to happiness, nor is attached to action which is conducive to good, that person imbued with the quality of Sattva, has attained freedom from doubts; he is wise and a man of true renunciation. XVIII/10

Since it is not possible for embodied beings to renounce all action completely, hence it is said that he who renounces the fruit of action has truly renounced. XVIII/11

Good, evil and mixed—threefold is the fruit of action hereafter for those who have not renounced the fruit, but there is none ever for those who have renounced the fruit. XVIII/12

According to the Gita, it is neither possible nor desirable for living creatures to renounce all actions (XVIII/11). Thus acts of sacrifice, gift and austerity and all other duties must be performed in all circumstances (XVIII/5, 6). Such works are essential for purifying even a wise man and for maintaining him in a state of purity. Without unremitting labour, even a wise man would soon fall a victim to evil and decay. True renunciation does not consist in taking the vow of a sannyasi or in donning the saffron robe. It does not require the relinquishment of actions but of attachments and the fruit of action (XVIII/9, 10, 11). It is improper to renounce actions that are prescribed (XVIII/7). Forsaking of duties, either due to ignorance or because all

action is believed to be painful is at best a very low and undesirable form of renunciation (XVIII/7, 8). True renunciation consists in renouncing the fruit of action; he who does this is a wise man (XVIII/10), he becomes free from the good, bad or mixed effects of his actions. (XVIII/12)

Grades of Works and Workers

The art of working has already been explained earlier, for example in verses II/47-51, III/19, 25, IX/27, 28. Bringing the lessons of Karma Yoga to a completion, this chapter classifies all works and workers into three grades and asserts that every one by performing his own duty in a spirit of dedication worships the Supreme Lord and attains the highest perfection.

> That action which is prescribed by scriptures and which is done without the sense of doership, without passion and prejudices, and without seeking its fruit, is said to be Sattvic. XVIII/23
>
> And that action which involves much strain and is done by one who seeks enjoyment and is prompted by egoism, is called Rajasic. XVIII/24
>
> That action, which is undertaken through ignorance, without considering the result, loss to oneself and injury to others and one's own capacity, is declared to be Tamasic. XVIII/25

These verses tell in brief what work to avoid, what work to do and how to do it. Work which is contrary to Dharma must be eschewed. Out of the many kinds of work permitted by Dharma, the individual must choose for himself not what is most popular or most difficult but that which suits his talents, liking and aptitude. Such work involves no effort and is a source of joy. It is likely to prove most beneficial to him and it attains its full spiritual value when he renounces the fruit of his actions, the sense of doership, attachment as well as hatred, when he entertains the feeling that he is doing God's work and only with God's authority and power and that the fruits of his labours belong to God and His creation.

The Rajasic or middle grade of work is that which involves much strain, is prompted by the feeling of I and mine, and is

undertaken for the sake of personal gain or pleasure. The lowest or Tamasic type of action is undertaken heedlessly, without paying any regard to one's capacity and its likely adverse effects on the doer as well as others. The lowest type of action, if it achieves any thing, does so at very great cost to himself as well as society.

Following the same line of thought, Sri Krishna has classified workers into three grades:

> A worker who is free from attachment and unegoistic, endowed with firmness and vigour and unaffected by success or failure, is said to be Sattvic. XVIII/26
> The doer who is passionate and greedy, desirous of the fruit of action, given to violence and impure conduct, and is affected by joy and sorrow, is declared to be Rajasic. XVIII/27
> Lacking self-control and piety, vulgar, arrogant, deceitful, inclined to rob others of their livelihood, slothful, despondent and procrastinating, such a doer is said to be Tamasic. XVIII/28

Kinds of Buddhi, Knowledge and Joy

In order that the aspirant may get a better appreciation of the major problems frequently encountered in worldly and spiritual activities, Sri Krishna has classified intelligence, knowledge and joy into three categories.

> The intellect which knows the paths of work and renunciation, right and wrong action, fear and fearlessness, bondage and liberation—that intellect, O Partha, is Sattvic. XVIII/30
> The intellect by which one understands incorrectly what is right and what is wrong, what must be done and what ought not to be done—that, O Arjuna, is Rajasic. XVIII/31
> That intellect which, enveloped in ignorance, thinks wrong to be right, and regards all things in a perverted way, that intellect, O Partha, is Tamasic. XVIII/31

These verses are an elaboration of the Buddhi Yoga rightly stressed by Sri Krishna. Every one must train and enlighten his intellect so that it can discriminate between right and wrong.

essentials and non-essentials, the seeming and the real good, the temporary advantage and the lasting gain. By education and exercise a Tamasic or Rajasic intellect is to be made Sattvic.

The knowledge by which man sees one imperishable Being in all existences, undivided in the divided, know that knowledge to be Sattvic. XVIII/20
But that knowledge by which one sees the manifold existences in all beings as separate and different from one another —know that knowledge to be Rajasika. XVIII/21
While that knowledge by which one clingeth to each one thing as if it were the whole, without reason, without grasping the reality, narrow, that knowledge is declared to be Tamasic. XVIII/22

As a powerful instrument, the intellect can be used either for good or for evil purposes; and the keener it is, the greater the harm it does, if misapplied. Similarly, it is possible for a man who is seeking knowledge to pick up the wrong kind of knowledge and to stick to it as if it were the truth.

The highest or Sattvica kind of knowledge sees unity in multiplicity, uniformity and kinship in variety. It promotes concord, harmony and cooperation. It emphasises the points of agreement rather than the differences. It teaches the gospel of one world.

The Rajasic type of knowledge believes all creatures to be separate entities, entirely unconnected with one another. Each can grow and expand regardless of the others; the social bonds are of no importance. Under the lowest form of knowledge the man regards himself as the heart and whole of creation, his religion as the only one that can lead to salvation, his god or saviour as the only Saviour, his point of view as the only one which is correct and his own knowledge as the only true knowledge.

And now hear from me, O Chief of the Bharatas, the three kinds of happiness. That in which a man comes to rejoice by long practice and whereby one reaches the end of sorrow; that which is like poison at first but like nectar at the end, that happiness is said to be Sattvic, born of an intellect

united with God. XVIII/36, 37

That happiness which arises from the contact of the senses with their objects and which is like nectar at first but like poison at the end—that happiness is held to be Rajasic. XVIII/38

That happiness which deadens the soul both in the beginning and at the end, and which is derived from sleep, indolence and carelessness is said to be Tamasic. XVIII/39

The highest (Sattvic) type of happiness is that which is obtained by hard work, service and self-discipline. Like a student's studies, it initially involves some pain in the form of self-investment, self denial and self-sacrifice, but at the end of all his troubles the aspirant finds the key to unending bliss. The middling (Rajasic) type of happiness includes the ordinary pleasures of the world which soon lose their charm and if carried to excess injure one's body and soul. The lowest (Tamasic) types of pleasure are based on delusion, spring from intoxicants, lethargy, wickedness and sin and are extremely short-lived and deceptive; truly speaking they are no pleasures but roots of sin: they defile and degrade the man.

The Gospel of Duty

In a final summing up Sri Krishna recounts the main functions of the four traditional Varnas or castes. Taken together these four classes include all humanity and their respective duties cover the entire range of human labour. Since no useful or necessary work can be left unattended, it is inevitable that different people should engage in different kinds of work. But this need not discourage anyone. For in two remarkable verses Sri Krishna declares that not only religious works but all duties performed devotedly and efficiently are worship of God and lead a man to the highest perfection.

Man reaches the highest perfection by each being devoted to his own duty. Listen how perfection is won by him who is intent on his own duty. XVIII/45

From Him all beings arise; by Him all this is pervaded. As such by the performance of his own duty a man worships

Him only and attains perfection. XVIII/46

These two verses are among the gems of Gita teaching. They underline the complete equivalance of religious and worldly works. Not only spiritual sadhanas and religious pursuits but also fighting and administration, trade and industry, science and art, adventure and invention are means to God realisation. Though the economic or material value of different professions is different, they are all ways of adoring the Lord and equally eligible as paths to peace and perfection. The spiritual value of a work does not depend on its remuneration or social importance but on the manner and the spirit in which it is performed; and this is true whether the work is sacred or secular.

The words 'Abhiratah', 'Niratah', occurring in verse 45 are intended to emphasise the necessity of performing every duty whole-heartedly, efficiently and to the best of one's ability. It is idle to expect that work done carelessly, unskilfully or in a dilatory manner will lead to perfection, or God realisation.

"The Gita's injunction", says Sri Aurobindo, "is to worship the Divine by our own work, Swa-Karmana; our offering must be the works determined by our own law of being and nature. ... To worship him with our inner and outer activities, to make our whole life a sacrifice of works to the Highest is to prepare ourselves to become one with him in all our will and substance and nature. Our work should be according to the truth within us.... A living and sincere expression of the soul and its inborn powers."

The same lesson was taught by Sri Krishna earlier.

He who established in unity worships Me abiding in all beings, that Yogi lives in Me, whatever his mode of living. VI/31

Not only does the kind of work or the nature of one's profession makes no difference, but it is essential for every one to perform the tasks for which he is most fitted by his aptitude, training, ability and interests. Different people must inevitably do different kinds of work. There will be nothing but chaos if every one makes a scramble for the so-called

higher professions or whole time religious sadhanas. All work necessary for the upkeep of life in the world is really God's own work and dear to Him. God expects every one to do his duty and do it well:

> Better is one's own duty, though destitute of merit than the duty of another though better to look at. He who does the work assigned to him by his own nature (Swabhava) does not incur sin. XVIII/47

> One ought not to give up the work which is suited to one's own nature, O Son of Kunti, though it has its imperfections; for every undertaking is beset with (some) faults as fire is with smoke. XVIII/48

These verses are the Essential Services Act of the Divine Government on earth. Explaining the importance of Swabhava, Sri Aurobindo writes: "All action must be determined from within, because each man has in him something his own, some characteristic principle and inborn power of his nature." "The child's education ought to be an out-bringing of all that is best, most powerful, most intimate and living in his nature; the mould into which the man's action and development ought to run is that of his innate quality and power. He must acquire new things, but he will acquire them best, most vitally, on the basis of his own developed type and inborn force. And so too the functions of a man ought to be determined by his natural turn, gift and capacities. The individual who develops freely in this manner will be a living soul and will have a much greater power for the service of the race."

Different Types of Yoga

Verses 51 to 58 give a resume of the different types of Yoga mentioned in earlier chapters, namely Dhyana Yoga (verses 51-53), Bhakti Yoga (verses 54, 55), Karma Yoga (verses 56, 57) and Buddhi Yoga (verses 51, 57, 58). Their mixture in varying proportions constitutes the great Yoga taught by Sri Krishna. As the supreme Master of all Yogas Sri Krishna could not possibly ask His disciple to follow one kind of Yoga to the

exclusion of others. Moreover, since he has insisted on whole time and all round union with God, the aspirant has naturally to make use of several types of Yoga so as to cover his entire life. The reader will notice that Buddhi Yoga is emphasised both at the beginning and end of these verses. The intellect is the charioteer of the chariot known as the human body. An intellect purified and fixed on God is an indispensable requirement for any one in quest of God. No system of Yoga, no kind of Sadhana, can be successful without a refined and divinised understanding—an understanding which is at once spiritual and practical, devoted to the Lord and yet in full control of both inner and outer nature.

With the understanding purified and united to God, controlling the self by firmness, having abandoned sound and the other objects of the senses, having laid aside passion and malice. XVIII/51

Dwelling in solitude, abstemious, speech, body and mind subdued, constantly fixed in meditation and Yoga, taking refuge in dispassion. XVIII/52

Having cast aside egoism, violence, arrogance, desire, wrath, covetousness, selfless and peaceful, he is fit to become the Eternal. XVIII/53

Having become one with the Eternal and cheerful in spirit, he neither grieves nor desires. He regards all beings as alike and obtains supreme devotion to Me. XVIII/54

Through devotion, he comes to know Me in reality, what I am and who I am; and thereby knowing Me in essence he forthwith enters into Me. XVIII/55

Though he may be constantly engaged in all kinds of work, yet having taken refuge in Me, he reaches by My grace the eternal and indestructible abode. XVIII/56

Surrendering mentally actions to Me and with Myself as your sole object, resorting to the Yoga of the intellect, have your thought ever fixed on Me. XVIII/57

With your intellect thus fixed on Me, you shall get over all difficulties by My grace. And if out of pride you will not listen to Me, you will be utterly destroyed. XVIII/58

The other important lessons conveyed in these verses, for

example freedom from egoism and cheerfulness of spirit, have already been discussed in earlier chapters.

The Epitome

> Fix your mind on Me, be devoted to Me, sacrifice to Me and bow to Me; so shall you without doubt reach Me. This I truly promise to you, for you are dear to Me. XVIII/65

> Dedicating all duties to Me, seek refuge in Me alone. I shall absolve you of all sins; grieve not. XVIII/66

The reader will recall that the first line of verse 65 is more or less a repetition of verse 34 of Chapter IX.

The assurance that you are dear to Me occurs in the previous verse also, XVIII/64. It is no wonder that man is dear to God, for is He not the father, mother and friend of us all? It is upto us to return His love, to prove worthy of His affection by our thoughts, words and deeds. All of us should endeavour to do this.

These famous verses sum up the teaching of the Gita in a beautiful manner. The aspirant who loves God, who constantly thinks of Him, who worships Him residing in all creatures, who makes all his acts sacrifices to the Lord, and who bows to Him everywhere, is sure to reach Him. Love of God, however, is not mere sentimentality but necessarily includes loving service to His creatures. Likewise to fix the mind on God does not necessarily mean formal meditation in an approved posture, but constant, undeviating memory of the Divine — through all the acts of life.

Sri Krishna asserts in verse 66 that all duties must be performed but as an adoration to the Lord, for His sake and pleasure. And he who offers all his works and their fruits to the Lord is untouched by sin, even as a lotus leaf is not wetted by water.

In these verses Sri Krishna has given two assurances: (1) man is dear to Him, the object of His constant love, interest and care; (2) Works performed as a call of duty or for the sake of the Lord become sanctified; God, and not the individual worker, takes responsibility for their authorship.

Teacher and Taught

Sri Krishna says:

> Thus has knowledge more secret than secrecy itself been imparted to you by Me. Having reflected on it fully, do as you like. XVIII/63
>
> Has this been heard by you with one pointed mind, O Son of Kunti? Has your delusion born of ignorance been destroyed? XVIII/72

These verses bring out the respective roles of teacher and taught. The latter gives all due respect and attention to the former. Sri Krishna has already explained earlier what attitude of mind on the part of a disciple best promotes his development. He said:

> Attain this knowledge by all means; if you prostrate yourself at the feet of the wise, render them all forms of service, and question them with a guileless heart, again and again, those wise seers of truth will unfold that knowledge to you. IV/34

Elsewhere in the scriptures every one is required to look upon his teacher—and upon his mother and father too—as God. Such respect and love make for the solidarity of the social structure and quicken the learning process. But would this injunction entitle the teacher (or the father and mother) to look upon himself as God—all wise, all powerful and perfect? Far from arrogating any such qualities, the enlightened and God-realised teacher would behave as a model of love and humility. He would impart knowledge to the pupil, train, develop and stimulate his intellect, and enable him to think for himself and stand on his own feet. He would not impose his ideas upon the disciple but leave him free to make his own decisions. He would not turn out weaklings who, having no mind of their own, would always be dependent upon him for help and advice, but strong and capable men and women fully qualified to meet the challenges of life. The teacher removes ignorance and delusion but having shown the way

he does not hold the disciple by hand to take him to his goal. (Also see Chapter II—Buddhi Yoga.)

Krishna and Arjuna

The Gita concludes with a note which is vibrant with life and faith and hope:

> Wherever is Krishna, the Lord of Yoga, and wherever is Partha, the archer, assured are there prosperity, victory, glory and righteousness. This is my conviction. XVIII/78

Using Sanjaya as his spokesman, Maharishi Vyasa has conveyed two important lessons through this verse.

In the first place he says that the truly spiritual life is not one of poverty and squalor but of abundance. The disciple of Sri Krishna strives not merely for righteousness or godliness but for all-round success and happiness. According to Gita while the exceptional man may limit his interests to the attainment of salvation alone, the average person has to pursue four objectives in life — not merely salvation but also wealth, dharma and legitmate desires.

Secondly, the work of the world requires cooperation between man and God. God could do anything in the twinkling of an eye. But if He did everything, what would be left for man to do? Therefore, God in his wisdom has so constituted the world that in order to achieve anything man has to exert himself. Nor is it right that man should endeavour to obtain by prayer alone that which he can get by his own effort. Man has the unique freedom to live his life according to his own lights. He can work either against God or for and with God. If he works against God, against his creatures or against His laws, he is sure to come to grief. Alternatively, he may plough a lonely furrow. But as a matter of fact, he is not alone in his strivings. The love and power and grace of God are available to him if he consciously works for God and invokes His help and inspiration. And he who makes God the partner of his life need have no fear or anxiety about his future: his worldly success and spiritual progress are both assured. (Also see Chapter I.)

Spread the Message of the Gita

The reader who has followed these pages would have realised that the Gita is a book of life. Its religion is humanitarian, rational, universal and practical. It appeals to man to live a full, rich and dedicated life. It inculcates friendliness and compassion to all, and does not demand exclusive allegiance to any particular prophet, ritual or scripture. To imbibe these teachings by study or even by listening is, therefore, an act of great merit, which eventually revolutionises a man's entire life.

> And he who shall study this sacred dialogue of ours, by him shall I be worshipped with the sacrifice of wisdom. Such is My conviction. XVIII/70
> The man who, full of faith, merely heareth it unreviling, even he freed from evil, shall attain the auspicious regions of the righteous. XVIII/71

Having studied or heard the teachings of the Gita, the aspirant should also put them into practice. Simultaneously he should do his best to make them widely known.

> *He who shall impart this most profound teaching of Mine to My devotees, having shown the highest devotion for Me, shall without doubt come to Me.* XVIII/68
> Among men there is none who renders Me more loving service than he; nor shall any one be dearer to Me than he on this earth. XVIII/69

He who spreads the message of the Gita is supremely dear to Sri Krishna. This indeed is thought which has encouraged me to venture upon this difficult undertaking inspite of being conscious of my limitations. The sages, philosophers, scholars and others who have written commentaries on the Gita in the past have done wonderful work. But in my humble opinion there are still many beauties of this Queen of Scriptures waiting to be unveiled by distinguished scientists who are also lovers of God. How I wish some eminent men of science, with the vision and pen of an Einstein, would be inspired to take up this noble task!

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